

# Special Issue: Cyrus the Great



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## Ramin Barzegar

**Ramin Barzegar** is a multi-faceted artist whose masterful creations span across various domains of visual arts. Starting as a fine art photographer in 1984, he has showcased an exceptional talent for conveying intricate narratives through compelling, emotionally charged visuals. His work has graced numerous exhibitions worldwide, garnering recognition and awards that attest to his profound artistic prowess. Ramin's artwork has been internationally recognized, earning him an impressive tally more than 25 awards to-date. Among these honors, his evocative photographs, "My VISION", stands out, having just won the esteemed title of "Architecture Photographer of the Year" at The International Photography Awards, one of the most prestigious accolades in the field.

However, he believes that the most valuable artistic work he did was in 2005, when after his efforts to illuminate Persepolis, UNESCO and Iran's cultural heritage held a global call for submission. His design was chosen as the winner amongst 360 participants from all over the world and was honored by UNESCO as the best design for lighting ancient monuments. A contract was signed with him for the implementation of lighting as well as a light hologram in the grounds of Persepolis. Unfortunately, the project after two months of implementation, was postponed due to the current policies in Iran.

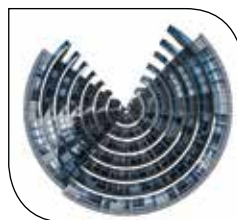
The two inside cover photos are samples of his collection, after every day, for two years, spent in Persepolis and the half-finished end result of his efforts. Along with his professional work, he continues to create works of art, but his wish is to complete the lighting design of Persepolis.

"Hopefully look forward for the day when we all celebrate the illumination of Parse."

**Reference:** <https://raminbarzegar.com/awards>



Susan Baraz  
International  
Photography Awards  
(IPA) Curator,  
Ramin Barzegar &  
Hossein Farmani  
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Ramin Barzegar's (My Vision),  
Winner of the International  
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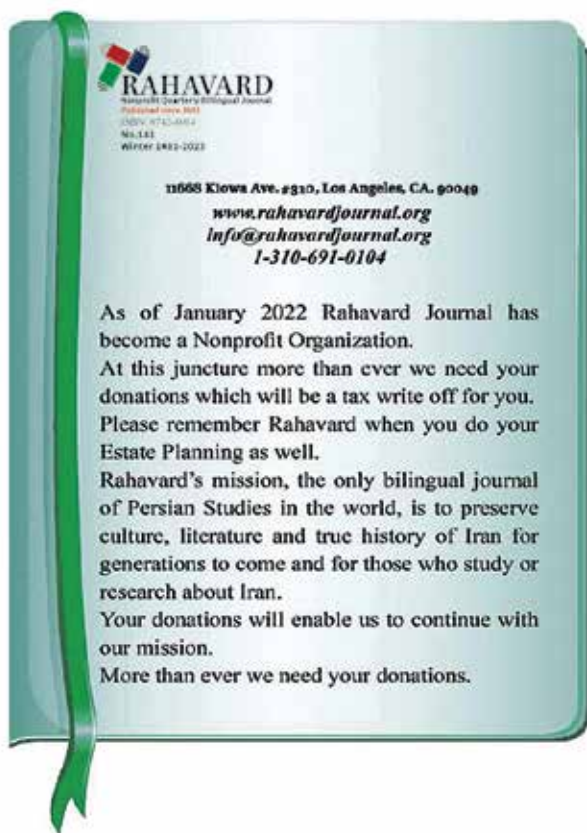
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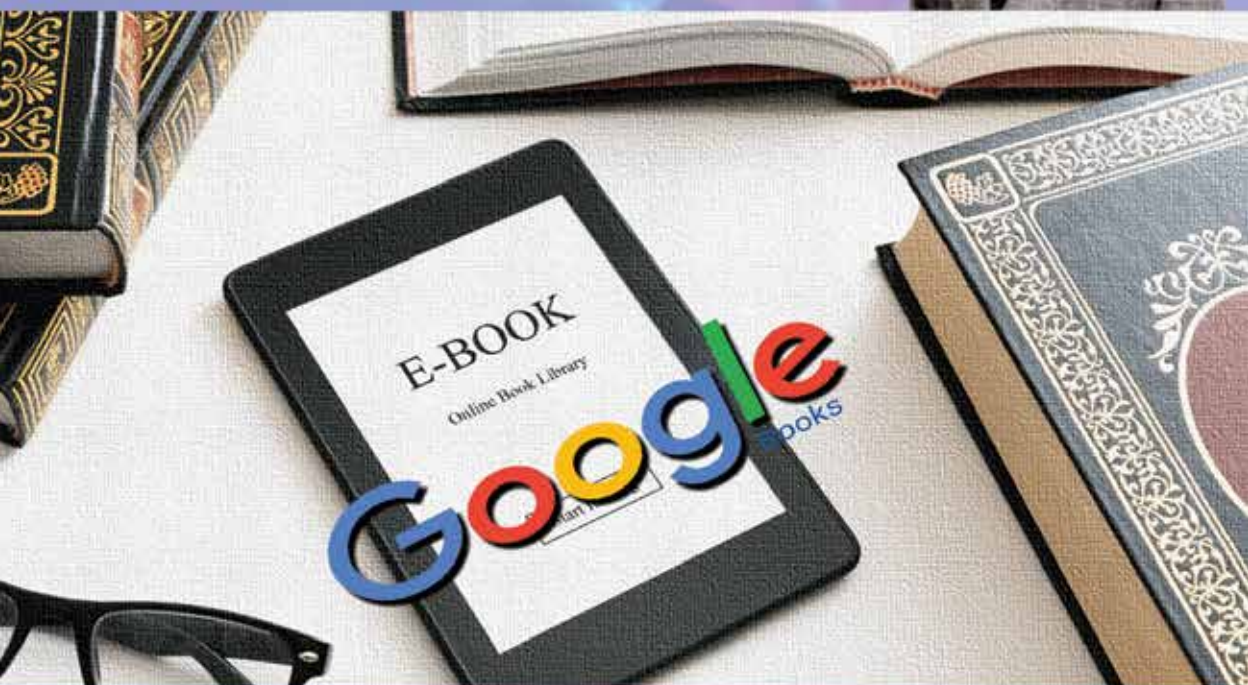
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## Special Issue: Cyrus The Great



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■ Farshid Delshad

## *Unveiling the Legacy of Cyrus the Great*

### **Editor's Prologue**

In the annals of history, certain figures wield an enduring influence that transcends time, leaving an indelible mark upon the world. Among these luminaries, Cyrus the Great emerges as a beacon of leadership, wisdom, and the embodiment of an empire founded upon the principles of justice, tolerance, and innovation. As the editor of this special issue dedicated to this magnificent monarch, I am honored to welcome you to this compendium of papers, which delves profoundly into the life, reign, and enduring legacy of this remarkable king. This volume signifies the culmination of years of rigorous research, scholarly dedication, and an unwavering passion for comprehending the man who established one of the most enduring and influential empires in history—the Achaemenid Empire.

Cyrus, whose reign spanned from 559 to 530 BCE, bequeathed a legacy that extended far beyond his own era. His deeds, meticulously recorded in ancient Hebrew, Greek and Latin annals and inscribed upon clay tablets, continue to inspire scholars, leaders, and thinkers across the ages. His unwavering commitment to religious freedom, human rights, and cultural diversity foreshadowed ideals that resonate deeply in our modern world.

In an epoch characterized by conquest and dominion, Cyrus pursued a distinctive path. His leadership was distinguished by a rare magnanimity. He promulgated a code of governance, famously known as the Cyrus Cylinder, which underscored the paramount importance of treating





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conquered peoples with fairness and respect. This remarkable document, often regarded as one of the earliest proclamations of 'human rights', stands as a testament to Cyrus's visionary foresight.

Nevertheless, Cyrus the Great's legacy is not devoid of intricacies. While he is celebrated for his enlightened rule, debates persist concerning his motivations and actions. Some contend that his policies of religious tolerance and deference to local customs were driven by pragmatic political considerations, aimed at securing the allegiance of the diverse subjects within his vast empire. This engenders an intriguing question: Was Cyrus a genuine visionary or a pragmatic statesman?

Yet, this collection of papers endeavors to unravel the layers of Cyrus's character and the complexities surrounding his legacy. It assembles a diverse array of essays and studies, each offering a unique perspective on this Persian monarch. Our contributors have explored various facets of his life and reign, encompassing his military campaigns, statecraft, cultural contributions, and enduring influence upon Persian civilization.

In this compendium, we have conscientiously balanced historical rigor with contemporary relevance. While the historical context and meticulous research remain paramount, we also aim to illustrate how Cyrus's legacy continues to shape our understanding of leadership, diplomacy, and multiculturalism in our contemporary era.

The principles championed by Cyrus—respect for diversity, religious freedom, and just treatment of subjects—remain as pertinent today as they were in ancient Persia. In an age characterized by cultural clashes and political polarization, Cyrus's legacy might serve as a poignant reminder of the enduring value of tolerance and empathy.

Professor Robert Rollinger (Austria) meticulously examines the concept of royal authority during the Persian Achaemenid Empire, accentuating its dynamic evolution over approximately two centuries. His discourse elucidates how notions of kingship and royal authority constituted integral components of a perpetually redefined tradition within the Middle Eastern milieu, playing a dual role in both demonstrating and reaffirming the monarch's power.



Professor Amnon Netzer from Israel (1934-2008), in Farshid Delshad's translation from Hebrew, delves into the historical interactions between Jews and various empires in the ancient Middle East, with particular focus on their experiences within the Babylonian and Persian empires. This discourse traverses the exile of Jewish populations to Babylon, their eventual repatriation to Judah following King Cyrus the Great's conquest of Babylon, and the subsequent reconstruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. The article underscores the profound influence of Persian culture and Zoroastrianism upon Judaism during this epoch, encompassing beliefs in resurrection and dualistic cosmology. It further delineates the favorable perspective of the Talmud regarding Iran and its civilization. Additionally, the article expounds upon the significance of the Book of Esther in Jewish history and its philological impact upon the Hebrew language. Overall, it accentuates the enduring themes of unity and social responsibility within the Jewish community across disparate eras and regions.

Professor Touraj Daryaee (USA) expounds upon the memory of Cyrus the Great, the progenitor of the Achaemenid Empire, during various historical epochs, particularly within the Sasanian Empire. Cyrus was held in high esteem for his benevolent governance and tolerance of diverse cultures and religions. Observations by Xenophon and biblical references illuminate Cyrus's favorable image. Despite the perturbations caused by Alexander the Great's conquest, the memory of Cyrus persisted. During the Sasanian period, he was celebrated as the "New Cyrus" within a Nestorian Christian ecclesiastical council. The article posits that the Sasanians may have attempted to obscure the memory of Cyrus in favor of their own historical narratives rooted in Zoroastrianism. Nevertheless, vestiges of knowledge concerning Cyrus endured in subsequent eras, as evidenced by historical texts and references by scholars such as Abu Reyhan Biruni. This article underscores the intricate nature of historical memory and the influence of religious and political ideologies upon it.

Robert Faulkner (USA) expounds upon the contrasting portrayals of Cyrus II within the works of Xenophon and Herodotus. Xenophon presents Cyrus as a rational and equitable ruler, whereas Herodotus paints a multifaceted



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portrait, encompassing instances of cruelty and piety. Xenophon underscores the tenets of rational governance and leadership, emphasizing education, justice, and military training. In contrast, Herodotus provides a broader historical panorama, intermingling customs and political insights, thereby showcasing the full spectrum of Cyrus's human qualities and vulnerabilities. Both authors contribute substantively to our comprehension of Cyrus II as a historical figure and monarch, accentuating his strengths and weaknesses.

British Amélie Kuhrt (1944-2023) dissects Cyrus the Great's statecraft, underscoring his creation of an expansive and influential empire identified as the Achaemenid dynasty. His policies of tolerance, cultural reverence, and successful conquests forged the bedrock of the empire's enduring system of governance. The article probes varying perspectives on Cyrus's actions and lingering ambiguities concerning facets of his life, such as his fate and religious practices.

David Stronach and Hilary Gopnik's treatise, "Pasargades," accentuates the imperative of accurately deciphering inscriptions at Pasargadae. Their interpretation aligns with Strabo's assertion that Cyrus the Great established Pasargadae as a commemoration of his triumph over Astyages, shedding light on Cyrus's historical role and revealing a hitherto unknown phase of construction during the reign of Darius. This phase encompasses substantial augmentations to Palace and the creation of a durable royal treasury, marked by a stone platform for Cyrus.

János Harmatta adopts a philological approach to contend that the downfall of the Median government and the ascendance of the Ancient Iranian Empire were not mere consequences of specific circumstances but rather a deliberate strategy. The Meds' policies created a challenge that Cyrus the Great and subsequent Achaemenid rulers adeptly addressed, establishing an advanced governance system of antiquity that endured for centuries. This system exerted a pivotal influence upon the evolution of subsequent empires, including the Hellenistic, Arsacid, and Sassanian realms.

The translated booklet "Cyrus the Great," edited by Touraj Daryaei, delves into Cyrus's life and legacy. Brian analyzes Cyrus's establishment of the





first Persian empire. Touraj Daryaee dissects his religious tolerance and the origins of his religious beliefs. Ali Mousavi underscores the significance of Cyrus's memorial structures. Matthew Wolfgang Stolper examines the content and objectives of the Cyrus Cylinder. David Stronach breathes life into Pasargadae through written and archaeological sources. The booklet additionally comprises a new English and Persian translation of the Cyrus Cylinder by Irving Finkel and Shahrokh Razmjou.

Elham Yaghoubian (USA) examines the significant influence of Cyrus the Great on Persian history and Judaism, highlighting how Jewish communities have preserved his memory throughout centuries in Iran.

Pari Azramvand Mokhtari (USA) examines Cyrus the Great's position in the history of human civilization. Her objective is not to delve into the details of his life and conquests but to briefly explore Cyrus' historical significance and his personal traits.

Farshid Delshad (USA) expounds upon "Artamène or Cyrus the Great" by Madeleine de Scudéry, a remarkable and memorable literary opus of 17th-century France. This voluminous epic, published between 1649 and 1653, garnered significant attention among French-speaking readers of the era owing to its intricate narrative, myriad characters, and vibrant symbolism. Curiously, there exists no known reference to this epic within Iranian studies or writings pertaining to Cyrus the Great. This concise report endeavors to elucidate why the title "Cyrus the Great" was chosen for this French novel, scrutinizing its symbolic connection to the historical figure and briefly discussing its impact upon contemporary culture and literature.

Russian Iranologist Muhammad A. Dandamayev (1927-2017) provides a comprehensive overview of the life of Cyrus the Great as an influential Persian sovereign. Born to Cambyses I and Mandane, he ascended to the throne in 559 BCE, toppling Astyages and subsequently conquering Lydia, Central Asia, and Babylon. Cyrus is celebrated for his religious tolerance and met his demise in battle against the Massagetae in 530 BCE, with his final resting place in Pasargadae.

Professor Rasoul Sorkhabi's article navigates Western historiography



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concerning Cyrus the Great, acknowledging the profound admiration he has garnered. It alludes to the appropriation of the name Cyrus in European languages and spotlights the contributions of Iranian scholar Hasan Prinia in synthesizing ancient and European sources pertaining to Cyrus. The article advocates for a major cinematic production centered on Cyrus while emphasizing the pivotal role of archaeological excavations in comprehending Achaemenid history.

Mani Iraninejad (USA) delves into the legends of Cyrus the Great within the Achaemenid Empire, primarily ascertained from Graeco-Roman sources. These legends reflect diverse perspectives on Cyrus and the development of the Achaemenid Empire. Iraninejad probes the historical context and proposes an assimilation process between Cyrus and Kay Kōsrow, accentuating parallels and suggesting Cyrus's integration into Iranian traditions.

Professor Rüdiger Schmitt (Germany) probes the etymology of the name Cyrus, a Persian appellation associated with notable figures such as Cyrus the Great. The precise origin of this name remains subject to debate, with proposed interpretations spanning from “young” to “humiliator of the enemy in verbal contest,” rather than the conventional interpretation of “sun,” which is considered erroneous.

Finally, Dr. Minou Gorji (USA) introduces select key works in English and some translated books into Persian on various aspects of Cyrus the Great.

In conclusion, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the contributors, scholars, and researchers who have dedicated their time and expertise to bring this compendium to fruition. It is my fervent hope that the insights contained herein will deepen our understanding of Cyrus the Great and, in so doing, inspire us all to aspire to greatness in our unique ways. Thank you for embarking on this voyage of discovery and contemplation. May the ensuing pages illuminate the life and era of Cyrus the Great, motivating us to persist in our pursuit of a more equitable and inclusive world.





■ Touraj Daryaee  
Maseeh Chair in Persian Studies & Culture  
Director of the Dr. Samuel M. Jordan Center for  
Persian Studies  
University of California, Irvine

### *Preface from Guest Editor of Special Issue*

Cyrus II, also known as Cyrus the Great is an important figure in the ancient world. He is someone who after twenty-six hundred years is respected among Iranians and many around the world. However, Cyrus is equally appreciated by those who are interested in history and the Biblical tradition. Even in the Greek sources which sees the Persians as conquerors, Cyrus singularly is considered as benevolent and worthy of emulation. The importance of Cyrus for the Greeks is not only apparent in Herodotus, but also the attention that Xenophon paid to this extraordinary figure. Greeks, Jews and Mesopotamians all have left us a brilliant image of Cyrus who laid the foundations of a first Afro-Eurasian empire in antiquity. However, creating an empire is not in itself special, but rather the way it is run and how its people are treated. The Teispid-Achaemenid Empire (Old Persian *būmi*-), shows a different sensibility towards its people, both artistically and also in its own words. The different people of the empire (Old Persian *\*vispadana*-), are acknowledged and taken to be the backbone of the functioning empire. Hence, it is a worthy task to better understand Cyrus' rule and have another volume dedicated to this great historical personage.

On the suggestion of Mrs. Sholeh Shams, the editor of Rahavard Journal, and with the help of colleagues Dr. Farshid Delshad, Mr. Mani Irannejad and Mrs. Gorjizadeh, I accepted to be the guest editor of this volume of the Rahavard Journal. Having edited an earlier volume on Cyrus the Great, I felt another more encompassing, and a more readable and bilingual (English and Persian), work for the educated reader would be beneficial. This volume can provide further access to the latest research on Cyrus II (the Great), who changed the history of Greater Iran and that of Afro-Eurasia in antiquity.







■ Amnon Netzer (1934-2008)

Commented Translation:  
Farshid Delshad

## *Jews, Assyria, Babylonia and King Cyrus*

One of the most significant missteps observed within the geographical entity known as the “Province Israel,” situated in the northern region, lay in its protracted conflict with the adjacent “Province Judea” in the south. This enduring discord had a progressively debilitating effect on the overall stability and vitality of this territorial domain. Another vexing challenge confronted by the inhabitants of the region was their engagement in hostilities with the formidable Aramaic Empire, encompassing the contemporary territories of Syria and Lebanon. Notably, the Aramaic Empire eventually succumbed to the dominance of the Assyrian Empire, subsequently positioning itself as a formidable adversary to the relatively diminutive Land of Israel. Consequently, Israel found itself subjected to tributary obligations vis-à-vis the Assyrian Empire, ultimately evolving into a protectorate thereof. Periodic acts of defiance exhibited by the provincial governors of Israel invited retaliatory incursions by the Assyrians, culminating in the captivity of multitudes of Jewish inhabitants. The Assyrians executed a population exchange strategy, relocating individuals from the Land of Israel to their own dominion, and reciprocally, with the intent of diminishing the indigenous populace's influence and resilience.

This historical fact is well-documented and widely accepted within scholarly discourse. During the 700 BCE era, the initial influx of Jewish immigrants from the Land of Israel into the Iranian domain resulted in their settlement in regions now recognized as Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Lorestan, Yazd, and

various other locales situated in the central expanse of the Iranian Plateau. The historical evidence substantiating the presence of Jews in Iran can be traced back to the year 772 BCE. By drawing upon Zoroastrian chronicles pertaining to the emergence of Zarathustra, it becomes evident that the settlement of the first Jewish immigrants transpired approximately a century prior to the formalization of Zoroastrianism as the predominant religion of the Iranian people. Consequently, the Jewish community's residence in Iran predates the establishment of the Mede Empire, establishing them as one of the most ancient and enduring populations in this nation.

We possess two reliable sources substantiating this theory: firstly, the Second Book of Kings within the Old Testament, and secondly, Assyrian epigraphs and cuneiform clay tablets. The latter inscriptions distinctly affirm the presence of Jews within the Mede Empire. This corroborates the narratives found in the Old Testament concerning the existence of Jews within the Iranian Plateau. Historical chronicles suggest that the Assyrian Empire resettled 'ten tribes,' indicating a substantial Jewish population. Legends further propose that a majority of the so-called "Lost Tribes" resided in regions now identified as Iraq and Afghanistan. Notably, late 19th-century Afghan historiographies even contain assertions of Afghan nobles and monarchs tracing their lineage to these "Lost Tribes." Additionally, other Jewish groups within the Iranian Plateau, liberated from Babylonian slavery through the decree of King Cyrus the Great, contributed significantly to the growth of the Jewish community in ancient Iran.

The Assyrian Empire met its demise at the hands of the Medes, with Jewish contributions playing a role in the Medes' victory. Concurrently, within the southern periphery of the declining Assyrian dominion, the Babylonian Empire was on the precipice of ascension. An event of profound historical significance for the Jewish people occurred during this period – the Babylonian invasion of the diminutive territory of Judea, transpiring circa 605 BCE.

The inception of this protracted conflict was instigated by the initial tribute rendered by King Jehoiakim. However, when King Jehoiakim reneged on his tribute obligations in the fourth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, it precipitated a subsequent siege orchestrated by Nebuchadnezzar.



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This siege ultimately culminated in the demise of King Jehoiakim and the enforced exile of King Jeconiah, his courtiers, and a substantial number of Judean inhabitants. Furthermore, King Jeconiah's successor, Zedekiah, and other prominent figures met the same fate, as decreed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Following the conquest of Babylon by King Cyrus the Great of Persia in 539 BCE, the exiled Judean populace was granted permission to return to their homeland of Judah. The historical chronicles contained within the Biblical book of Ezra document the initiation of the construction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, a significant undertaking believed to have commenced circa 537 BCE. This momentous event assumes profound importance in the annals of Jewish history and culture, as it symbolizes the resuscitation of the central religious institution of Judaism subsequent to its obliteration at the hands of the Babylonians in 586 BCE.

The erection of the Second Temple served the dual purpose of furnishing a tangible locus for Jewish religious rituals, including worship and sacrificial rites, while concurrently signifying the enduring resilience and unwavering faith of the Jewish populace in the divine providence. This reconstruction, following the period of Babylonian exile, held the pivotal function of reconstituting Jewish religious observances and conventions that had been previously disrupted. The Second Temple emerged as an instrumental catalyst in precipitating a spiritual and cultural resurgence within the Jewish community. Through its restoration, the Jewish people were afforded the opportunity to re-establish a profound connection with their religious heritage, fortify their faith, and safeguard the preservation of their cultural identity.<sup>1</sup>

## Persia's Golden Era and Post-Babylonian Jewish Life

The designation of the Iranian ruler Cyrus as "God's Messiah" within the Torah is noteworthy for its rarity in the context of Old Testament references to monarchs. This distinctive appellation serves as a testament to the profound sense of appreciation and indebtedness exhibited by the Jewish community

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1- Cf. Dunn, James G.; Rogerston, John William (2003). *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing. p. 545 ff.



toward the Iranian liberator, who bestowed upon them the precious gifts of freedom and dignity. This designation finds its basis in the Book of Isaiah:

This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name for the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me.<sup>2</sup>

This passage does not stand as the sole instance of the mention of the name “Cyrus” in various liturgical and sacred Jewish texts, such as the Mishnah and Gemara, where the great Persian king’s name is reverently alluded to. The salient aspect of Cyrus’ emancipation of the Jewish people resides not only in their attainment of freedom but also in their restoration to their native land, accompanied by the retrieval of their looted possessions and sacred artifacts, previously seized by Nebuchadnezzar, the Assyrian sovereign.

The period of captivity or enslavement, which endured for approximately half a century, engendered a profound sense of unity and cohesion among the Jewish populace. Simultaneously, it served as a crucible for the creation of numerous literary, philosophical, and theological masterpieces. Initially, the transmission of Jewish knowledge occurred through oral means, with rabbis engaging in explications and dialectical discourse concerning the Torah and deliberations on the Tanakh (Thorah, Nevi'im Ketuvim), all of which transpired in the absence of written works beyond the canonical Biblical texts themselves.

The prevailing circumstances underwent a profound transformation, primarily precipitated by the events of 70 CE, which marked the obliteration of the Jewish commonwealth and the Second Temple, leading

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2- Cf. Isaiah 45:1-4.





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to a subsequent disruption in Jewish societal and juridical paradigms. To elucidate, the Assyrian captivity engendered a pivotal shift from a predominantly oral literary tradition to a written one. Confronted with the exigencies of a new reality, characterized by the absence of a central teaching and study locus, namely the Temple, and the loss of substantial territorial autonomy in Judea, the period witnessed a surge in legal discourse, concomitant with the inevitable decline of the oral pedagogical system. It was during this juncture that the burgeoning body of rabbinic discourse commenced its transcription, subsequently evolving into the primary impetus and cornerstone of the Babylonian Talmud.

Between approximately 520 and 516 BCE, the Jews returned to Israel and undertook the reconstruction of their Temple, a endeavor generously financed by the Persian King Darius from his royal treasury. In the annals of Jewish diaspora, it is noteworthy that the Achaemenid Empire stands singularly as an ancient empire that displayed a remarkable commitment to upholding the principles of liberty and religious freedom for the Jewish people, extending their benevolent disposition toward other nations as well.

Throughout the course of history, the contours of Jewish culture have been shaped not only by accommodating empires but also by adversarial ones. An illustrative manifestation of this influence can be discerned in the nomenclature of Hebrew months, which conspicuously reflects Babylonian cosmological and meteorological conceptions. However, perhaps the most profound influence on Judaism emanated from Zoroastrianism, the predominant and dominant religion in Iran for an extensive period, particularly since the Sasanian dynasty.

A salient illustration of this influence is the belief in resurrection, conspicuously absent from the Old Testament. This observation implies that the composition of the Torah predates the emergence of Iranian influence on Jewish eschatology. Nevertheless, vestiges of this theological tenet are discernible in the writings of several Jewish prophets who evidently lived during the era of Iranian rule in Israel.



The belief in dualistic cosmology, featuring the juxtaposition of forces denoting good and evil, as well as the acknowledgment of entities such as Satan and angels, finds its roots in the pervasive influence of Iranian-Zoroastrian thought on the theological perspective of Judaism. Notably, this influence extends beyond the realm of theological concepts to encompass philological and lexical elements evident in the Old Testament and other Hebraic liturgical texts like the Talmud. Of particular interest is the profound impact of Iranian linguistic contributions, exemplified by the term “דָּת” (dat) or “religion” in Hebrew, which constitutes a significant juridical and religious lexeme. This term, “dat,” bears the imprint of Iranian linguistic heritage, with its etymological lineage tracing back to Middle Persian “dāt” and New Persian “dād” cf. داد, ultimately deriving from the earlier Old Persian “dāta,” connoting “justice” and “law.”

The Talmud, held in profound reverence by the Jewish community, conveys a notably favorable perspective on Iran and its civilization. In 230 BCE, when Alexander the Great contemplated his invasion of Iran, he sought assistance from the High Priest of Jerusalem to furnish his troops with provisions. The High Priest’s response, a resolute refusal invoking loyalty to the Achaemenid monarch, Darius the Third, serves as a poignant testament to the profound appreciation and moral obligation that the Jewish people harbored toward the Iranian rulers.

Although the period of Babylonian enslavement was relatively brief, its repercussions on Jewish life were profoundly deleterious. Some historians posit that without the intervention of Iranian liberation, the prospect of revival or even survival for this community would have been exceedingly bleak. Subsequent to the downfall of the Achaemenid Empire, which had served as a paramount ally to the Jewish populace, under Alexander’s dominion in approximately 231 BCE, Israel fell under Greek dominion, instigating an extended era marked by instability, apprehension, and religious persecution. Once again, the Jewish community could rely on Iranian support to liberate Jerusalem, a momentous event dating back to 168 BCE, facilitated this time by the Parthian Empire. This protracted struggle endured for more than eight decades, culminating in the Maccabean



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Revolt, which ultimately brought an end to the conflict<sup>3</sup>.

Hanukkah, celebrated by Jews worldwide, commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem during the Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucid Empire. In contrast, “The Book of Esther” was composed during the Parthian Empire era, recounting the narrative of a Hebrew woman named Esther, also known as Hadassah, who ascends to the throne as queen of Persia and thwarts a genocide planned against her people. This narrative underpins the Jewish holiday of Purim and is noteworthy for its unique feature in the Bible—the absence of explicit mention of God.

Set within the Persian capital of Susa (Shushan) during the third year of King Ahasuerus’ reign, the Book of Esther’s designation of “Ahasuerus” corresponds to Xerxes, likely stemming from the Persian term “xšayārša.” In contemporary scholarship, Ahasuerus is commonly identified as Xerxes I, who ruled from 486 to 465 BCE. The Book of Esther assumes its place as the final component of the Tanakh. According to the Talmud, the Book of Esther is attributed to a redaction by the Great Assembly, originally composed by Mordecai. Its creation is typically ascribed to the 4th century BCE. Classified within the Ketuvim (Writings), one of the three divisions of the Jewish canon, the Book of Esther is regarded by certain sources as a historical novella crafted to elucidate the origins of the Purim festival, which coincides with the Persian New Year, Nowruz.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the Book of Esther holds significant philological significance. The presence of

3- The Maccabean Revolt (Hebrew: מֶרֶד הַחֲשֹׁמוֹנָאִים (Mered ha-Ḥashmonáim); Greek: Επανάσταση των Μακκαβαίων: épanátasé ton makkabaíon) was a Jewish rebellion, lasting from 167 to 160 BCE, led by the Maccabees against the Seleucid Empire and the Hellenistic influence on Jewish life. The revolt itself involved many battles, in which the light, quick and mobile Maccabean forces gained notoriety among the slow and bulky Seleucid army, and also for their use of guerrilla tactics. After the victory, the Maccabees entered Jerusalem in triumph and ritually cleansed the Temple, reestablishing traditional Jewish worship there and installing Jonathan Maccabee as high priest. A large Seleucid army was sent to quash the revolt, but returned to Syria on the death of Antiochus IV. Its commander Lysias, preoccupied with internal Seleucid affairs, agreed to a political compromise that restored religious freedom. Cf. Tcherikover, *Victor Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, New York: Atheneum, 1975, p. 48 ff.

4- Cf. David R. Blumenthal. “Where God is not: the Book of Esther and Song of Songs”. Retrieved April 19, 2016.

nearly all Iranian loanwords in the Biblical Hebrew lexicon can be traced back to the narrative of Esther in the Old Testament.<sup>5</sup>

Irrespective of any contentious aspects inherent to a critical reading and interpretation of the Book of Esther, this Old Testament chapter serves as a poignant testament to the enduring themes of solidarity and social responsibility within the Jewish community. Moreover, it illuminates the enduring sense of unity and shared empathy that have transcended temporal and geographical boundaries, binding Jewish communities across diverse eras and locales.

This article comprises a commentary and translation of a segment from Amnon Netzer's Hebrew work titled: מורשתם וזיקתם : עברם, יהודי אירן : 1988, אמנון נצור, יהודי אירן : עברם, מורשתם וזיקתם : 1988, לארץ ישראל, הוצאת בית כורש, Yehudei Iran: Ivram, morashtam, uzeikatom le'erezt Yisrael, Beit Khorsh {publishing house}, 1988

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5- Cf. P. de Legarde, *Purim: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Religion*, Göttingen, 1887; H. S. Gehman, "Notes on the Persian Words in the Book of Esther," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 43, 1924, pp. 321-28; A. Hintze, "The Greek and Hebrew Versions of the Book of Esther and Its Iranian Background," in S. Shaked and A. Netzer, eds., *Irano-Judaica III*, Jerusalem, 1994, pp. 34-39.





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## *The Memory of Cyrus the Great*<sup>1</sup>

“They (Persians), on their part,  
reverenced Cyrus as a father”<sup>2</sup>

In the fourth century BCE when Xenophon having visited the Persian Empire, he wrote this important line about Cyrus the Great. This meant that among the Persians, Cyrus was remembered long after he had created the Teispid-Achaemenid Empire. However, this is part of a longer observation by this mercenary soldier of the Cyrus the Younger, reflecting on Cyrus the elder. The complete sentence is as such:

“That Cyrus’s empire was the greatest and most glorious of all the kingdoms in Asia—of that it may be its own witness. For it was bounded on the east by the Indian Ocean, on the north by the Black Sea, on the west by Cyprus and Egypt, and on the south by Ethiopia. And although it was of such magnitude, it was governed by the single

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1- This is mainly from an earlier article, T. Daryaee, “On Forgetting Cyrus and Remembering the Achaemenids in Late Antique Iran,” *Cyrus the Great: Life and Lore*, ed. M.R. Shayegan, ILEX Foundation, 2019, pp. 221-231, with a few minor extra observations.

2- Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 8.8.1: Perseus Project <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0204%3Abook%3D8%3Achapter%3D8%3Asection%3D1>.





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will of Cyrus; and he honoured his subjects and cared for them as if they were his own children; and they, on their part, revered Cyrus as a father.”<sup>3</sup>

It was already then known that the largest known empire of the antiquity was the work of Cyrus the Great, but more importantly it was his relationship to his people. The idea that Cyrus “honoured his subjects,” comes through not only from Greek observations, but also from the Bible, where the Jews having taken into exile by the Babylonians. As the Cyrus Cylinder states, the view of Cyrus the Great by the population of Mesopotamia was just the same as for those of the Jews and the Iranian and non-Iranian speakers. This idea of tolerance of different people and their traditions is something important in that was not seen before Persian rule, and rarely seen after the fall of their empire. This fact makes Cyrus an important figure to be studied outside of the nationalist paradigm, and as an ideal ruler of antiquity.

With Alexander’s conquest there appears a disruption in the historical memory of the Achaemenids, but it is not a total loss. Alexander himself while setting fire to Persepolis, visited Cyrus’ tomb at Pasargadae and honored him.<sup>4</sup> During the Seleucid period, certainly the idea and memory of the Cyrus and Darius were alive and was played on, though the Greco-Macedonian sensibilities muted such pronouncements.<sup>5</sup> With Mithradates I and the Arsacids, still the Achaemenids appeared to have been seen as their ancestors. However, it was not Cyrus the Great, but Artaxerxes II who was seen as the Arsacid connection.<sup>6</sup> In a sense Cyrus was not forgotten, but his memory took on a different form which could be seen in the meager literary text that exists in the post-Arsacid period. Here, we shall survey the

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3- Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 8.8.1.

4- T. Daryaee, “Alexander at Pasargadae and the Frawaši of Cyrus,” in *The World of Alexander in Perspective: Contextualizing Arrian*, eds. R. Rollinger & J. Degan, Otto Harrassowitz, 2022, p. 357.

5- Tuplin, “The Seleucids and Their Achaemenid Predecessors: A Persian Inheritance?,” *Ancient Greece and Ancient Iran: Cross-Cultural Encounters*, eds. S.M.R. Darbandi & A. Zouranatz, Athens, 2009, p. 123.

6- A. Melikyan, “The Hypothesis of the Arsacids’ Descent from the Achaemenids: Myth or Reality?,” *BIOS I/2*, 2021, p. 46.



material in the Sasanian and the post-Sasanian period to see what is known of one of the greatest personalities in antiquity.

During the Sasanian Empire, when Iran's national history, the *Xwadāy-nāmag* or the "Book of Lords" was being composed, a Nestorian Christian ecclesiastical council had convened in Iran. In this council which begun with the name of the king of kings, Khusro Anōšag-ruwān, the great Persian monarch was hailed as the "New Cyrus."<sup>7</sup> Thus, Cyrus loomed large in the minds of the Christians of the Sasanian Empire in the late ancient world. A century before, the great king of kings, Yazdgerd I had a much closer connection with the Christians and the Jews.<sup>8</sup> We have detailed information on the part of the Jewish exilarch (Middle Persian *Reš Galūt*), when we read that Huna b. Nathan had said to Yazdgerd I, for example to adjust his undergarments!<sup>9</sup> This close observation may be based on the belief that Huna b. Nathan may have been king of kings' brother-in-law, Yazdgerd I having married Nathans' sister.<sup>10</sup> This idea is echoed in the Zoroastrian Middle Persian texts, such as the *Šhrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* where it is said (*ŠĒ* 47):

"The city of Susa and Šūštar were built by Šišīnduxt, the wife of Yazdgerd, the son of Šābuhr, since she was the daughter of *Reš Galut*, the king of the Jews and also was the mother of *Wahrām Gōr*."<sup>11</sup>

Whether Nathan was the exilarch or not is not important, but what is significant is that the story (b. Zev 19a) tells us that the exilarch had hailed Yazdgerd I "a new Cyrus," suggesting the very good relations between the Jews and the Persian court, <sup>12</sup> and the possibility of transferring such knowledge to the Persian court.

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7- Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale*, 69-70; R. Payne, *A State of Mixture: Christians, Zoroastrians, and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity*, California, 2015, p. 99.

8- G. Widengren, "The Status of the Jews in the Sassanian Empire," *Iranica Antiqua* I, 1961, pp. 140-42; J. Neusner, *A History of Jews in Babylonia: V. Later Sasanian Times*, Leiden, 1970, pp. 8-13

9- Neusner, p. 253

10- Neusner denies this p. 253

11- T. Daryaei, *Šhrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr. A Middle Persian Text on Late Antique Geography, Epic and History*, Costa Mesa, Calif., 2002, p. 20

12- Widengren, 1961, pp. 140-42; Neusner, pp. 8-13



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This, however, does not mean that the Sasanians did not encounter the Jews and did not hear about the Achaemenids earlier. The Talmud does provide points of contact during Shapur I onwards where there are intense discussions of law and tradition between Jewish rabbis and the king.<sup>13</sup> Even on the margins of the Sasanian Empire, during occupation of Dura Europos during the reign of Shapur I in 256 CE, we find interesting information. Along the western walls of the city, between gates 18 and 19 stood the Jewish synagogue. When visiting the synagogue, the Sasanians left 12 inscriptions on the wall paintings and one on the panel scene associate with the story of Purim is of interest. My reading of the inscription is as follows:

In the month of Mihr, on the year of 14 and day of Frawardīn when Hormizd the scribe and the Kardag of the district and the pious scribe and they came to this district of the Jews, to this place of worship of the god of gods of the Jews, they way this painting, they saw and liked... saw ...painting...<sup>14</sup>

The Dura inscriptions and their choice of location points to the fact that the Sasanians in late ancient period may have had some knowledge about the Achaemenids. The encounter at Dura by the Sasanian with the Achaemenid Persians via the painting at the synagogue was only one of the possible avenues of transmission of the Achaemenid tradition. The visit to the Dura synagogue by the Sasanian officials should make us ponder about the relations between the Jews and Sasanians and how the Biblical stories, specifically those related to the Achaemenids may have been received.

We know that the Sasanians made visits to Persepolis and specifically in the fourth century CE and left inscriptions, but what we see with the Middle Persian inscription at Dura synagogue, indicates Sasanian officials viewing as if visiting a museum and look into the distant past. Their guides being Jewish, no doubt and providing a history of the Judeo-Persian past in the Achaemenid period. The Purim panel would have been evidence of

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13- J.S. Mokhtarian, *Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings, and Priests: The Culture of the Talmud in Ancient Iran*, California, 2015, p. 79-80 & 83-84.

14- For earlier studies see also, T. Daryaei, "To Learn and to Remember from Others: Persians Visiting the Dura-Europos Synagogue," *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia*, vol. 8, 2010, p. 32.

the close connection between the Jews and Persians at a critical moment in history, when the Sasanians had conquered Dura from their Roman adversaries. How the population would be treated depended on the position of different people in the city, and every bit of precedence for the Judeo-Iranian contact would have thus been useful.

The Armenians who were in close relations and were involved in various ways with the Sasanians, gave ample space in their national history to Cyrus. Movses Khorenatsi in the fifth century CE to some extent details Cyrus overthrow of the Medes, who was aided by Tigran to establish Persian rule.<sup>15</sup> But how this information would have reached the Sasanian court and the transfer of knowledge is totally unclear in the fifth century. We are really in the dark about the choices and interests of the Sasanians about the Achaemenids. Among the modern scholars, someone like Arthur Christensen, whose historicizing tendencies is well-known believed that the vague idea that Persia had been in continual warfare with the Greeks, is perhaps the only remembrance which had remained in the late ancient world for the Sasanians.<sup>16</sup>

Let us see what evidence is there for the third century CE with the establishment of the Sasanian Empire, where there seems to be a change in religious ideology, even though our sources are late in this regard. I'd like to reiterate what R. Shayegan has discussed about the early Sasanian inscriptions and lineage, specifically Shapur I's at Naqš-e Rostam, where the king of kings could not recount more than three of his ancestors before himself, namely Ardxašīr, Pābag and Sāsān.<sup>17</sup> So, his (MP) āhēnegān or ancestors beyond this point can not be established, while by the time of the Middle Persian texts, in the late Sasanian and the post-Sasanian period, with the Bundahišn and Perso-Arabic texts such as Tabarī, a detailed genealogy had been constructed to give legitimacy to the Sasanian dynasty.

Aradxāšīr ī Pābagān, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty in the late Sasanian

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15- Movses Khorenatsi, *History of the Armenians*, translated by R. Thompson, Harvard University Press, 1978, 24, p. 113.

16- A. Christensen, *Les Kayanides*, Copenhagen, 1931, p. 154.

17- M.R. Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians: Political Ideology in Post-Hellenistic and Late Antique Persian*, Cambridge, 2011, pp. 2-3.





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and post-Sasanian period related to a Dārā-ye ī Dārāyān, which could be either Darius III, or as Oktor Skjærvø has suggested a conflation of the last Achaemenid king of king's memory with that of the Persis Dārā's which is to be found in the Pahlavi.<sup>18</sup> R. Shayegan has put forth the idea that in fact between the last Achaemeind king, Darius III and Ardaxšīr I, there was a dynasty which should be called the Dārāyānīds, during the Arsacid Empire.<sup>19</sup> Hence, even a more remote connection between the Sasanians and the last of the Achaemenids becomes farfetched. This Sasanian construction in the Kārnamag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pābagān (Vitae of Ardaxšīr, son of Pābag) appears to have been late sixth or seventh century compilation,<sup>20</sup> and as Frantz Grenet has suggested, a reading stable of the late Sasanian and Abbasid court.<sup>21</sup> In the Kārnamag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pābagān, it is said that Ardaxšīr is from the nāf ī dārāy šāh (scion of king Dārā), and this is a late source and an epic romance which exhibits very little historical antecedents. In this connection between Dārā and Ardaxšīr I, we can turn to a Manichaean Papyri which Heinrich and Koenen edited and published more than four decades ago, which provides the tantalizing name, \*Dārēw-Ardaxšīr, for the founder of the Sasanian Empire.<sup>22</sup> But, even this papyri is dated to the fifth century CE work.<sup>23</sup> Then, the question is what did the Sasanians know or said of their past, or even Cyrus or the Achaemenids in Late Antiquity?

What we have from the 6th CE Xwadāy-nāmg-inspired sources, be it Middle Persian texts, Perso-Arabic texts such as Tabarī, Bal'amī and others is a completely different world-view, where there was no Cyrus present,

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18- Oktor P. Skjærvø, "The joy of the cup: A pre-Sasanian Middle Persian Inscription on a Silver Bowl," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 11, 1997, pp. 102-103.

19- M. R. Shayegan, "Nugae Epigraphicae," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 19, 2005 (2009), p. 171.

20- If we are to follow Čunakova, but this dating has been seriously questioned, see A. Panaino, "Two Astrological Reports of the Kārnamag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān (III, 4-7; IV, 6-7)," *Die Sprache*, vol. 36,2, 1994[1996], p. 393.

21- F. Grenet, *La geste d'ardashir fils de Pābag*, Paris, 2003, p. 29.

22- A. Henrichs and L. Koenen, 'Ein griechischer Mani-Codex,' *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* v, 1970, p. 121; cited in M.H. Dodgeon & S. N. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars AD 226-363*, London, 1991, p. 354

23- W. Sunderman, "Studien zur kirchengeschichtlichen Literature der iranischen Manichäer II," *Alorientalische Forschungen* xiii, 1986, pp. 290-291.

but Dārā (Darius), who is remembered. Encapsulating the Achaemenid history with Dārāy ī Dārāyān, that is Darius son of Darius, perhaps Darius I and Darius III, provides a glimpse of a past, although we don't know when its knowledge could have been acquired. Hence, the entirety of the Achaemenid period is placed in the Kayanid period, when then Ardaxšīr becomes their descendant.<sup>24</sup> Was it through the Frataraka's who were in the province of Persis during the Seleucid and Arsacid period that Darius was remembered? Or was it through the Zoroastrian Magi who remembered the coming of Alexander and the death of Darius III and the dispersion of the sacred tradition and the snuffing out of the fire-temples? This is a difficult question to answer, but our medieval Persian sources provide some interesting information on the Achaemenids which suggests an avenue of remembering the remote past. If we did not have the polymath Abu Reyhan Biruni's account of the genealogy of the Achaemenids and its securitization with that of the Achaemenids,<sup>25</sup> or other sources such as Fārsnāme-ye Ibn Balkhī from the homeland of the Achaemenid Persians mentioning the Achaemenid Darius and his building of roads and the communication system (postal system),<sup>26</sup> we would say that the Sasanians had long forgotten the Achaemenids and there was not memory of them left in Late Ancient Iran. But we do possess the information by historians of late antiquity and continually by them into the medieval times, on the eastern and western frontier of the Iranian world. So how could the Sasanians not know or remember them? If the Jews, Armenians and other Christians remembered them, how is it that the Persians themselves did not?

The key I believe is to understand the nature of historiography in the late ancient world. In this period history unfolded according to the sacred narrative of religious group. So Armenian and Byzantine historiography unfolded according to the Christian world view, while for Iran, Zoroastrianism

24- Fārsnāme-ye Ibn Balxī: Dārā b. Dārā "who was killed during the time of Alexander the Roman and he was the last of the Kayanids," ed. G. Le Strange and R.A. Nicholson (1921), republished by Donyā-ye Ketāb, Tehran, 1363, p. 15.

25- E. Yarshater, "The List of Achaemenid Kings in al-Biruni and Bar Hebraeus," Biruni Symposium, ed. E. Yarshater and D. Bishop, New York: Center for Iranian Studies, Columbia University, 1976, pp. 49-65.

26- Fārsnāme-ye Ibn Balkhī, p. 55.



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became the sacred narrative for writing the history of the past. As Armenia's ancient history received a "Christian orientation," and later as the Islamic history received a "Quarnic orientation," one can argue that Iranian history took on a "Zoroastrian / Avestan" orientation." Jean Kellens has reminded us that if the Avesta is the main corpus / hymns of the Zoroastrians, the term itself and anything such as a book / text is a late antique text, from the Sasanian period.<sup>27</sup> But if we also take the idea that the Avestan alphabet was invented in the 4th century during the reign of Shapur II,<sup>28</sup> then there was a good moment to have an Avestan "book" come into being in late antiquity.

By the sixth century when the *Xwadāy-nāmag* (Book of Lords / Kings) was written, the oral tradition was partly put down for posterity, as the history of Iran's past. Again if we are to follow Jean Kellens, his observations on the Avesta is extremely important as this text provides the mythical history of the *Aryā* or the Iranians.<sup>29</sup> If one purviews the Avesta with a historical eye, one can deduce that the *Yašts*,<sup>30</sup> specifically *Yašt* V, X, XIX among others, provide glimpses of a narrative, which the Sasanians considered to be their ancient history. It is significant that the Avesta was put in its final form during the Sasanian period, very close to the time that the national history of the Iranians, the *Xwadāy-nāmag* (the Book of Lords / Kings) was also put to writing.<sup>31</sup> So, it is no surprise that the *Xwadāy-nāmag* is heavily influenced by Avestan lore, geographically and historically. What is important to note is that this geographical horizon and kings and heroes of the past began to be associated with the Iranian Plateau

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27- J. Kellens, "Les Achéménides et l'Avesta," *Septimo Centenario de los Estudios Orientales en Salamanca*, Universidad de Salamanca, 2012, pp. 551.

28- K. Hoffmann, "i. The Avestan Script," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshater, 1987, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/avestan-language>.

29- J. Kellens, "Les Airiia-ne sont plus des Āryas: ce sont déjà des Iraniens / Ir. Airiia- only means <<Iranian>>," *Āryas, Aryens et Iraniens en Asie Centrale*, eds. G. Fussman, J. Kellens, H.-P. Francfort, X. Tremblay, De Boccard, Paris, 2005, p. 237.

30- For the *Yašts* see P.O. Skjærvø, "Hymnic Composition in the Avesta," *Die Sprache*, vol. 36, 1994, pp. 217-220.

31- For the study of Iran's national history see Th. Nöldeke, *Das iranisches Nationalepos*, Berlin, 1920; E. Yarshater, "Iranian National History," *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. E. Yarshater, vol. 3(1), Cambridge, 1983, pp. 359-480; A. Shapur Shahbazi "On the *Xwaday-namag*," *Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater*, *Acta Iranica* 30, Leiden, 1990, pp. 208-29.

and its late antique kings, the Sasanians. One can go even further and state that many of the Sasanian kings acted and conducted themselves according to the customs of the ancient kings and potentates of the Avestan Yašt. In a sense they were playing a part in the narrative epics of the past, where there was no mention of the Achaemenids.

From the 5th century CE Sasanian kings and princes adopted Avestan names and titles, namely: Kawād, Kāwūs, Rāmšahr, Kay and then Khusro are all connected with this tradition. The inclusion of the word Xwarrah “Glory” or “Fortune” is a further indication with the preoccupation with this mythical past / history (Khusro II). Thus, something had changed in the ideological orientation of the Sasanians because of events in the fifth CE. This “ancestral” past is then connected with the tragic murder of Dārā/Darius, and the destruction of the Avesta by Alexander of Macedon.<sup>32</sup> Whatever and wherever this memory came from, and it could be perhaps genuine priestly tradition, which in turn also preserved Dārā, the coming of Alexander as an important point in the great break from the past. From then onward Alexander became a half-brother of Dārā and legitimized in the Iranian national epic tradition, and Cyrus was nowhere to be remembered. Then the Arsacids made a brief appearance, a Walāxš which in the Dēnkard collected the sacred narrative and a short list of Arsacid names, where by the time of the Šāhnāmeḥ, we have the famous passage: (Šāhnāmeḥ VI.82-83):

چو کوتاه بد شاخ و هم بیخ شان      نگوید جهاندار تاریخشان  
کزیشان جز از نام نشنیده ام      نه در نامه خسروان دیده ام

Since their genealogy and lineage was short  
No worldly person can retell their history  
From them I have heard nothing but their name,  
Nor have I seen anything in the Book of the Kings<sup>33</sup>

One could argue that it may be that the Arsacids were aware of the Achaemenids

32- For the intricate development of Darius III's imagery and memory in the Irano-Islamic tradition see, P. Brian, Darius dans l'Ombre d'Alexandre, Fayard, Paris, 2003, pp. 443-486.

33- A.-Q. Ferdowsi, The Shahnameh (The Book of Kings), ed. Dj. Khaleghi-Motlagh and M. Omidssalar, vol. 6, Bibliotheca Persica, New York, 2005, p. 139.

and even the figure of Cyrus. What is interesting is the change in Arsacid imperial ideology which pushed the philhellens to gravitate towards the Iranian tradition, specifically those of the Achaemenids.<sup>34</sup> But this connection, even if known by the Sasanians would have brought little interest in their preservation and its omission from the national tradition. In Zoroastrian memory, the Arsacids were never rehabilitated. In a unique and interesting Middle Persian text (apocalyptic MU29), the memory of the Arsacids make an appearance:

“and the third, the brazen branch which you (Zoroaster) saw, is the rulership of the Arsacids (Aškiyānīyān) is manifested, where they conducted (themselves) sinfully, and ruled Ērānšahr in the manner of Alexander of evil lineage, and they will destroy the good religion.”<sup>35</sup>

This clear indictment of the Arsacids, however, a late Pahlavi text maybe, suggest a disdain for this dynasty which ruled the Iranian Plateau for almost five centuries. By the late Sasanian period a sacred history was refashioned which reused the ancient monuments of the Iranian Plateau with the Avestan-type tradition from Eastern Iran, coordinating and moving sacred history and locations from the East (Central Asia) to the Iranian Plateau. In this way Zoroastrianism and Zoroastrians refashioned Iran's textual and topographical history. This history was temporally removed from what the Judeo-Christian tradition knew and what the Greco-Roman had remembered.<sup>36</sup>

In the Eastern tradition, the Avesta-inspired narrative had certainly impacted the history and world view of the Sasanians. The emphasis was on the antiquity of this history, but in fact, much of it was new and refashioned the Zoroastrian tradition to justify Sasanian rule in the late ancient world. In this new scheme of

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34- J. Neusner, “Parthian Political Ideology,” *Iranica Antiqua*, vol. 3, 1963, p. 56; for the connections to Cyrus the Great see J. Wolski, “Le Titre de ‘Roi des Rois’ dans l'idéologie monarchique des Arsacides,” *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 30, 1982–1984, ed. 1988, p. 160; and also for Cyrus and Arsacid's further connections, J. Wiesehöfer, “King of Kings’ and ‘Philhellen’: Kingship in Arsacid Iran,” in *Aspects of Hellenistic Kingship*, Aarhus, 1996, p. 59.

35- MU 29 87.9, T. Daryaei, “Alexander and the Arsacids in the manuscript MU29,” *DABIR*, Vol. I, 2016, p. 9.

36- M. Canepa, “The Transformation of Sacred Space, Topography, and Royal Ritual in Persia and the Ancient Iranian World,” in *Heaven on Earth: Temples, Ritual, and Cosmic Symbolism in the Ancient World*, Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2013, pp. 319-72.







Cyrus pardoned by his father Jacob Abbott

historiography, not only the Achaemenids were forgotten, but also the founder of the first Persian Empire, Cyrus the Great. A *Dārā-ye Dārāyān* or *Dārā b. Dārā* was the only remembrance of what we may mentioned of an Achaemenid past, and their monuments associated with Kayanid and mythical heroes and rulers of the past, or the paladins of the Iranian epic. Cyrus the great was remembered by the Jews and Christians of the Persian Empire, but the empire chose to nominally forget him and replace the remote past with another past.

However, in the post-Sasanian period, one still sees a knowledge of Cyrus and particularly that of the Achaemenid kings. For example, the great Persian savant, Abu Reyhan Biruni was able to compile a list of the Persian kings, long after they had been ruling.<sup>37</sup> But also how are we to account for the fact that in the fourteenth century Shiraz, in the *Ardashīr-nāme* of the Jewish Persian author, *Shāhīn* mentions Cyrus,<sup>38</sup> but those in the province of Persis would have forgotten him? That seems hardly believable, to think of a complete forgetfulness of Cyrus by all the Persians. This is a problematic issue that needs further research into Classical Persian literature to discern what was remembered of Cyrus the Great, and what was lost through the long process of history in Iran.

37- E. Yarshater, "List of the Achaemenid Kings in Biruni and Bar Hebraeus," in *Biruni Symposium*, eds. D. Bishop and E. Yarshater, *Persian Studies Series* 7, New York, 1976, pp. 49-65.

38- A. Netzer, "On the Characterization of Cyrus the Great in Jewish and Judeo-Persian Writings," *Acta Iranica* 2, 1974, p. 43.





## *The Ancient Iranian Perception of Cyrus the Great*<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

While the only surviving legends of Cyrus the great are found in the Graeco-Roman sources, they ultimately speak to various viewpoints in Achaemenid Iran on Cyrus. Following a survey of historical conditions surrounding the rise of the Persian Empire by Cyrus and its consolidation under Darius, characteristics of western Iranian historiography concerning the Median “state” and the dawn of the Persian Empire during the Achaemenid period are explored. It is argued that the Median and Iranian orientation of the Achaemenid Empire from the time of Darius provides the possibility of infusion of Young Avestan myths and legends in western Iran. In particular, the parallels between stories of Cyrus the great and Kauui Haosrauuah (Kay Kōsrow) are investigated that point to a process of assimilation of the former with the latter that probably started in the Achaemenid period and later led to a two-way interaction of legends about these two figures. In addition, the depiction of Alexander in the Iranian tradition and his association with Kay Kōsrow, analogous to his association with Cyrus the great in the western sources are pointed out that may further show the assimilation of Cyrus the great with the Iranian tradition by being identified with Kay Kōsrow.

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**Keywords:** Cyrus the Great, Medes/Medians, Achaemenids, Alexander, Western Iran, oral Iranian tradition, oral Iranian epigraphy

## **Introduction**

The Iranian view towards Cyrus the great consists of what the Iranian world of the Persian Empire thought of him in its own cultural milieu. Such discussion is hampered by the paucity of Iranian material on Cyrus. After all, his memory appears to have fallen into oblivion in Iran by late antiquity at the latest (Daryaei, 2018). Apart from the brief mention of “Cyrus of our family” in the Behistun inscription (DB I.10), we find the detailed accounts of Cyrus, presumably coming from Iranian circles, in the Greek and Latin sources. Nevertheless, to extract the Iranian point of view regarding Cyrus in these sources, we have to consider the Greek lens and its perspective toward the Persian Empire (Sancisi-Weerdenburg & Kuhrt, 1987). On the other hand, it is not easy to discern the nature of the Iranian tradition in the Achaemenid period and what this tradition might have had included. Apart from the brief references of Avestan texts, Iranian legends appear in the much later national Iranian tradition of early Islamic period (Yarshater, 1983). The evolution of this tradition from the Avestan time down to late antiquity is not well understood. Therefore, we must pay attention to the chronological problems that comparison of Greek sources of Achaemenid period and the later Iranian tradition bears.

Several studies have focused on the idealized image of Cyrus in *Cyropaedia* and its comparison with the Iranian tradition. Christensen noted the similarity between the speech of Cyrus (*Cyropaedia* VIII.8) and the later Iranian tradition. He then concluded that the final message of a dying king to his heir and court belongs to the Iranian tradition (Christensen, 1936: 127 f.). In addition, the tone of the discourse of Cyrus’ speech at deathbed reminds us of the Naqš-e Rostam inscriptions of Darius at his tomb (DNa/ DNb). As Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1985: 468-471) shows, while all elements in Cyrus’ prayer and farewell address can be accounted for as Greek individually, the entire group of topics strikingly coincides with the Naqš-e Rostam inscriptions. An acknowledgment of the divine benevolence, a justification of the personal right of the king to rule, a retrospect of his



period of government, both on the moral and the military levels, care for the future of the dynasty and kingdom and care for the reputation of the king himself among posterity are shared. Furthermore, while merits of a model of exemplary conduct in *Cyropaedia* is also reflected in Xenophon's earlier writings (such as proficiency in hunting and domestic affairs, military ethos, philosophical education, and humane governance), Knauth (1975) have showed the striking resemblance between parts of *Cyropaedia* and the later Iranian epic tradition. Cyrus' behavior, attitudes, and some discourses in *Cyropaedia* parallel those of kings in the *Šāh-nāma* as well as Darius' inscription at his tomb (DNb). He concluded that Xenophon embroidered his tale about the exemplary monarch on a framework that ultimately derived from the Iranian tradition in the sense of the political philosophy of the Socrates school of thought. Therefore, the unhistorical Cyrus of *Cyropaedia* can reflect at least some aspects of the Iranian ruler model.

Apart from reflection of the Iranian ideal ruler model in *Cyropaedia*, the historiography of Herodotus, Ctesias and Xenophon about Cyrus the great with their divergent accounts can point to the Iranian tradition as well. Christensen (1936) has provided a general survey of the Iranian motifs present in Greek sources regarding the Medo-Persian tradition. However, a detailed analysis of accounts of Cyrus with respect to the Avestan tradition is lacking, which can give us insight into the Iranian perception of Cyrus the Great in the Achaemenid period. In what follows, first we review the historical background of rise of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the great in the Iranian context with a particular attention to the preceding Median confederacy. Then, we tackle the question of the Median and Iranian orientation of the Achaemenid Empire. This historical background would enable us to view the figure of Cyrus in an Iranian context and provides arguments for the focus of the study which is the analysis of the Achaemenid period Iranian historiography on Cyrus the great in the western Iranian context. Then, we consider the possible assimilation and interaction of legends of Cyrus the great with the Avestan tradition, which have lingered far beyond the demise of the Achaemenids as well as his disappearance in the Iranian historiography.



## The Median Background

Cyrus's own reflection of his background reveals his Elamite affiliation since he introduces himself as king of Anšan along with his ancestors (Finkel, 2013: 110-111). The use of this title might have had ideological reasoning within the Mesopotamian world (Zournatzi, 2011). Still, his appreciation of the Elamite tradition is visible in his throne name Kuraš, that is Cyrus (Tavernier, 2007: 528-30; Henkelman, 2011: 585, n25) as well as dressing in Elamite garb (George, 1996: 379-80). Nonetheless, the Elamites play no role in any Greek tradition of Cyrus' rise to power. Instead, Medes are highlighted as the precursors of the Persian power and Cyrus is depicted as closely linked to the Median court. This representation brings us to the question of the "Median dilemma" that needs to be dealt with alongside the analysis of the Median prominence in the Greek sources.

It is not clear if the people that are called Medes in our sources called themselves Medes (Lanfranchi, 2003: 84). There is no trace of such ethnonym in the later Iranian tradition. It seems that the terms Madāya and Māda in the Assyrian and Old Persian sources originated from a toponym. By the Achaemenid period, this toponym came to be used for the whole of the central Zagros and father to the east. In accordance with the highly fragmentary political landscape in this region (Radner, 2003), the linguistic and probably ethnic landscape was also fragmentary. The attested Median proper names point to a variety of local Iranian dialects or languages in northwestern Iran. The so-called "Median" language may not be a homogenous and well-defined Iranian language (Rossi, 2010; 2017). However, the Iranian trait became dominant following the rise of a Median monarchy and confederacy down to the dawn of the Achaemenid Empire.

The Medes of Iranian decent seemingly dominated a confederation in northwestern Iran leading to the fall of the Assyrian Empire. The Babylonian "fall of Ninveh Chronicle" (Grayson, 1975: 90-96) mentions the Medes as Ummān-manda (a destructive and untamable force with a loose unifying leadership, Liverani, 2003: 7) led by Umakištar (Greek Cyaxares, Old Iranian Huvaxšθra). Considerably, two of the insurgents who rebelled against Darius



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the great, the Median Fravartiš and the Sagartian Ciçantakhma, declared themselves descendants of Huvaxšōra (DB II.24, 33). These claims indicate the sphere of influence of the legendary Median leader, who seemingly founded a Median monarchy and a larger confederation with his fame being sufficient for legitimization (cf. Rollinger, 2021: 341). About six decades later than the fall of Ninveh, the Babylonian chronicle of Nabonidus speaks of the Median ruler Ištumegu (Greek Astyages, Old Iranian \*Ršti-vaiga) centered in Hagmatana/Ecbatana whose territory probably covered the central Zagros region. Thus, the Median monarchy that Huvaxšōra probably founded and was continued by his descendant(s), had a legacy in the Zagros region, especially in the Iranian speaking parts of Greater Media.

The sphere of influence of the Median kingdom might have covered northern Iran (see below). This sphere borders countries of Avestan provenance on the east, making the diffusion of the Avestan tradition into Media probable. Anyhow, the Median sphere of influence played prominently in the rise and consolidation of the Persian Empire.

## Rise of the Persian Empire in the Iranian Context

The foundation of Persian Empire originates from Cyrus the great's initiative of unifying the heterogeneous local rulers of the Persian heartland. While Cyrus' title of King of Anšan indicates his desire to relate to the traditional dynastic locality (Potts, 2005; Stronach, 2013), his dynasty was probably of Iranian decent based on onomastic evidence (Strabo XV.3.6; Cyrus I's son \*Aryuka, Tavernier, 2007: 117). Moreover, most probably Cyrus found support from a powerful group of Persian nobles of Iranian decent, i.e. the Achaemenids through a marriage alliance (Waters, 2004). Taking the leading role in making alliances in the Persian heartland, Cyrus sought to expand his rule to form the world's largest empire.

The first step of the expansion of Cyrus' rule was apparently instigated by Astyages's expedition to conquer Persia. According to Nabonides Chronicle (II.1; Grayson, 1975: 106), Astyages mustered his army and marched against Cyrus, for conquest. Cyrus with his small army dispersed the vast Median horde and took their king Astyages captive to his land (Sippar Cylinder I.29;





Schaudig, 2001: 417). In this context, we hear of kings on the side of the Median king, which show the sphere of influence of the Median confederacy. Thus, at the time of Cyrus the great Astyages attempted to bring Persia into his sphere of influence, which actually ushered the beginning of the Persian Empire.

Following the fall of Media, Parthia and Hyrcania probably allied with Cyrus as suggested by Ctesias. Similarly, the Sakā people contributed to the expedition of Cyrus against Croesus (Persica §4). The activity of Cyrus in East Iran however is not clear. Nonetheless, Cyrus probably campaigned against Bactrians and the Sakā (Herodotus, I.153, 177; cf. Ctesias, Persica §§ 2-3). On his way toward the Sakā, Cyrus received help from Ariaspian in the Helmand River area (Arrian, III.27; cf. Curtius VII.3). On the same path, Cyrus might have reached the country of Paropamisus in the HinduKush Mountain (Pliny, Natural History, VI.25). Considerably, these lands were of Avestan significance. There are hints at the establishment of a cluster of garrison sites in the frontier zone of the middle Jaxartes River by Cyrus (Arrian IV.2.2; IV.3.1; Curtius VII.6.16, 19, Justin XII.5.12; Strabo XI.11.4). Apparently, securing the northern borders of East Iran was a strategic goal for Cyrus the great.

Cyrus probably faced his fate in the same landscape in his campaign against the Massagetae (Herodotus I.201-214) who were nomadic people in the wide lowlands to the east of the Caspian Sea and the southeast of the Aral Sea, probably between the Oxus and Jaxartes Rivers (Strabo, XI.8.6). They were probably neighbors of the Sogdians and in contact with Chorasmians (Arrian IV.16-17; Curtius VIII.1.3-8; Strabo XI.11.8.8). Darius the great might have defeated them (Polyaenus VII.11.6); hence they are to be included in the Sakā Tigraxaudā (Vogelsang, 1992: 235). The Massagetae could have some subdivisions, among them probably was Derbices or at least they were neighbors (Strabo XI.8.8; Pliny VI.18.48). In Ctesias's account, Cyrus waged his last campaign against the Derbices and the Sakā headed by their king, Amorges, came to help Cyrus (Persica 29; Photius, Bibl. 72.7-8). Most probably, Ctesias invented this Amorges by confusing \*Humarga with Haumavargā (Greek Amorgioi) which is the Persian designation of a Sakā group. Probably the continuous menace of nomadic raiding in northern borderlands of East Iran forced Cyrus to act and the nomads who implemented a mobile war tactic defeated him.



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In sum, it appears that the Medes and their sphere of influence were critical factors in the formation of the Persian Empire under Cyrus the great. In addition, Cyrus' concerns on the northern borders and his assignment of one of his sons as lord of Bactria demonstrate the importance of East Iran (Ctesias, *Persica* § 8). This importance of Iranian countries of the Persian Empire persisted under Darius and his successors.

## The Median and Iranian Orientation of the Achaemenid Empire

The picture drawn from the Behistun inscription seems to form the image of Media during the Achaemenid Empire. The country list of this inscription shows a Median bias as Māda heads most of the lands in the northern parts of Iran, namely Armina, Katpatuka, and Parθava (DB I.6; cf. presence of Medes in Anatolia, Herodotus I.72, 103; Parthian allegiance with Medes, Ctesias apud Diodorus II.34). The Behistun text furthermore talks about some form of relationship between the Medes and Varkāna along with Parθava (Vogelsang, 1992: 125; also *Cyropaedia* I.1.4 implying submission of Hyrcanians to Astyages). Hence, Media figures as a supra-regional entity reaching from eastern Anatolia to central western Iran and farther to the east. Commensurate with the image of Media in the Behistun inscription, we have legends of the Greek authors signifying the Median power. Their agreement against the historical reality indicates a Median orientation in the Achaemenid Empire. Darius names Medes along with Persians as the constituents par excellence of the Empire (DB I.11, 12; DPg 1-2; also Herodotus VIII.89). The title "King of Persia and Media" for the Achaemenid king beginning with the reign of Xerxes is considerable (Tuplin, 1994: 256). Darius' reliance on loyal Medes (DB II.25; III.41) might have played a role in this prominent representation. For instance, Taxmaspada's support who was a Median, was crucial for Darius' success (DB II.33). We should also note the pronouncement of Darius (DB I.13) that "neither Persian nor Mede nor anyone of our family" would act against the usurper. Beside Elamites, who were native in the imperial heartland, the Medes were apparently the only conquered people who acquired positions of high rank (Briant, 2002: 81). Here we attempt to see this Median bias in a broader Iranian context.



The Achaemenid family of Darius along with some other Persians had an Iranian orientation. Personal names of Gāθic origin or related to the Gāθic circle amongst the Achaemenids are widely attested (Cantera, 2017). The emphasis on AhuraMazdā in Darius' inscriptions in contrast to the Elamo-Indo-Iranian dominant religious reality of the imperial heartland (Henkelman, 2021) is a manifestation of this orientation. Evidently the Old Persian language of Achaemenid inscriptions were written with an interdialectal koine that was probably comprehensible for at least western Iranians (Rossi, 2010: 320-1). By the end of the Achaemenid period, Iranians from East Iran to some parts of Persia and Media had an approximately common language (Strabo XV.2.8). Such common language should have been a variety of Old Persian as a sort of lingua franca for Iranians of the Persian Empire. The onset of this common language might go back to the time of Darius (Panaino, 2015). The explicit adoption of the term Ariya "Iranian", for the language in the Behistun inscription bears witness to a conservative declaration of belonging to a common ethno-religious heritage. Highlighting the Iranian heritage may also show an acknowledgment of Darius' broader base among Iranian peoples, observable in the crisis following the fall of (false) Bardiya in Parthia, Bactria and Arachosia (Waters, 2004: 98). Consequently, we may suppose that the Medes of Iranian decent along with other Iranians received a particular attention from the Achaemenid administration.

Darius the great relied on the Iranian elite, in particular, the Persians and Medes of Iranian origin, for administration of the empire. As such, he probably went after a unifying force through which the Iranian elite can gather. We may note that the Medes were called anciently by all people Arioi, i.e., Iranians (Herodotus VII.62). Acknowledging the ethnical heterogeneity of Greater Media in the first half of the first millennium BCE (Zadok, 2002) leads us to note that the highlighted Iranian identity of Medians originally held true for eastern Medes (Arizantoi, Herodotus I.101). This ethnic character of Iranian identity commensurate with the Avestan tradition contrasts with the linguistic and religious nature of Iranian identity among early Persians (Irannejad, 2022). Therefore, it is likely that the Avestan tradition had reached the Medes sometimes in the first half of the first millennium BCE (see further below).



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During the reign of Darius the great the Iranian identity in the Achaemenid inscriptions became ethnic as well. Consequently, Darius introduces himself as Iranian beyond being Persian and hence he stresses the supremacy of Iranians over all other ethnic origins in the empire (Herrenschmidt 1976: 52-56). Thus, the Iranian orientation of the Persian Empire that might have started from Cyrus' construction of the Persian Empire, was probably reinforced through the events that led to the consolidation of Darius' hold on the imperial throne. This Iranian bias opts us to investigate possible Avestan traits of the Median tradition that was current during the Achaemenid Empire.

## The Median Logos and Its Iranian Traits

As a prelude to the story of Cyrus the great's rise to power, the early "history" of the Medes is detailed in the Greek tradition, beginning with the rule of Assyria in Upper Asia and the revolt of the Medes against them (Herodotus I.95 ff., Ctesias, Persica, books I-VI Apud Diodorus 2.21.8; 28.8; 2.32.5; 34.1; Xenophon, Cyropaedia, books II-VI). Particularly, it is quite possible that what Herodotus wrote about this matter could have derived from western Iranian sources (Herodotus I.95) that portrayed a continuum of Medo-Persian history. The verifiability of names in this account and its clichés (e.g. Herodotus I.106) speak to an oral tradition as its source. Zournatzi (2013) shows that the Medo-Persian logos was meant to promote Cyrus' rightful accession to a rule of Asia traced to the Assyrians. The Persian bias of the narrative is best attributed to the ultimate Persian sources reflecting the impact of the political rhetoric of Persia on accounts about its subjects' historical past. Yet, the Median logos has a special position in this context that also reveals the Avestan orientation of the account.

The Median logos represents a combination of elements of heroic oral sagas of Avestan heritage as well as some elements of actual history of the Medes grouped in a continuous chronological dynastic framework (cf. Helm, 1987: 81-88). The chronological framework and the structuring by reigns of kings is probably a Greek product (Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1994). Details of the emergence of the Median state could have been fashioned after Greek political experience and/or contemporary Achaemenid practices (Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1988: 211). Nonetheless, we can contextualize some aspects



of the rise of Median power within the Avestan tradition. While the ahistorical account of Herodotus (I. 96-101) about the emergence of the Median kingdom can partially draw from the Greek model of state formation (How & Wells, 1928: 104) in the Greek ideological context of the story (Meier et al., 2004), its core may reflect a legendary tradition held by the Medes. Insistence on Justice and wisdom in this story (also Aeschylus, *Persae* §§ 765-770) have direct Old Persian parallels (DNB 3-11; 17-24). There is also correspondence between the “eyes” and “ears” of the Achaemenid kings (Herodotus I.114; cf. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* VIII.2) on the one hand, and spies and eavesdroppers of Deioces (Herodotus I.100) on the other. The Achaemenid kingship might have seen the Medes as part of their own history and attributed elements of their own phenomenology of domination to them (Walter, 2004: 91). Notwithstanding, the role played by Miθra as the god of the contract, on the respect of which he supervises, has parallels with the concept of royalty depicted in the story of Deioces and the later Achaemenid kingship institutions (Panaino 2003). In Mehr Yašt, Miθra has thousand ears, ten thousand eyes and ten thousand spies (Yt. 10.7, 24, 60, 91, 141). We may see in this respect that in the western Iranian worldview evident in the story of Deioces, the king is assimilated with Miθra. The theophoric name \*Miθra-ka of a Median city lord (apud Rossi, 2017: 484) can bear witness to such phenomenon. Thus, behind these parallels between the Median and Achaemenid kingship ideology lies a series of possible adoption of Avestan patterns concerning royalty and its legal function in the defense of the order.

Some elements of the story of the mythical founder of the Median monarchy could have been borrowed from the Avestan tradition regarding primordial kings. The process that led to choosing Gayōmard (Mas’ūdī, Pellat, 1965, II: 106) and Deioces (Herodotus I.96-98) are similar. Gayōmard is the hypostasis of the first human in the Avesta and king in the later Iranian tradition (Christensen, 1918, I: 89; 1936: 113). In addition, we hear of the construction of Ecbatana with seven concentric walls with white, black, purple, blue, orange, silver, and golden battlements (Herodotus I.98). According to the lost Avestan *Sūdgar Nask* (apud Dēnkard IX.22.4) Kāy Ūs (Av. Kauui Usan), who was considered a primordial sovereign in the Avestan milieu (Irannejad, 2020: 258-9), constructed a sevenfold mansion in the Harburz Mountain: one of gold, two of silver, two of steel, two of crystal (cf.



Šāh-nāma, ed. Khaleghi, II: 93 f.). Ṭabari (ed. De Goeje, 1879: 601-2) names this sevenfold construction the city of Kangdež. Greater Bundahišn (32.12) mentions that beams of Kangdež were seven of gold, silver, steel, bronze, iron, glass, and crystal. Thus, Deioces' traits and legends were constructed by a combination of Iranian legends of primordial kings and handed down to us through the lens of sophistic Greek theories on how states come into being (see Meier et al., 2004 for the Greek viewpoint).

According to Herodotus (I.102), Deioces had a son, Phraortes (Old Pers. Fravertiš), who inherited the Median throne. He allegedly had an unsuccessful march against Assyrians in which he was perished along with most of his army. His story might have roots in the events narrated in the Behistun Inscription, in which we read that Fravertiš, the great Median rebel, took the throne name of Xšaθrita of the family of Huvaxšθra (DB II.24). Clearly, the throne name Xšaθrita had a legacy, which must be of the city lord rendered as Kaštari in Assyrian sources of Kār-Kašši in the Central Zagros Mountains around 672 BCE. Xšaθrita was apparently an ally of the Medes, Manneans, Cimmerians and some other groups in the region (Starr, 1990: No 41-51, 60, 62). He was still remembered in Greater Media as an influential leader who might have organized one of the first military attempts against Assyrians in the region. On the other hand, it is possible that the memory of the rebel Fravertiš who named himself Xšaθrita along with his assertion of coming from the family of Huvaxšθra later were combined in legends among the Medes. Thus, the old hero Xšaθrita was remembered as Fravertiš and since was supposed to antedate Huvaxšθra and concurrently of his family, he was assumed to be his father.

Regarding the Medo-Persian history, we have an earlier, though very brief account of Aeschylus (Persae §§ 760-770): Medus, an eponym for the founder of Media, was the first to rule over Asia, followed by his son. After him, the third one was Cyrus who established peace for all his people and won the divine favor through his right-mindedness. In this account, we see a Median dynasty that had only two kings, followed by Cyrus the great which is commensurate with historical events extracted from Near Eastern sources. Thus, the Median monarchy, which was probably founded by Huvaxšθra and only lasted as far as his son, was later expanded to include





an unrelated hero of the old in Greater Media along with a mythical founder derived from the Avestan tradition.

Evidently as early as the reign of Xerxes, the Greeks were familiar with the concept of Medo-Persian kingship continuity which accords with the Medo-Persian naming of the Achaemenid king in Babylonian documents. This concept leads us to assume that western Iranians considered the rule of Cyrus as a continuation of the Median monarchy. The Avestan elements of the legends of the founder of the Median monarchy along with the ethnic Iranian identity among the Medes like the Avestan tradition raises the possibility of diffusion of this tradition among the Medes. In this light, we will investigate the legends of Cyrus the great in the western Iranian context to explore possible Avestan traits.

## **Legends of Cyrus the Great in Western Iranian Context**

Cyrus the great's rise to power and his demise were subjects of popular legends in western Iran (Herodotus I.95. 214; *Cyropædia* I.2.1). Therefore, there must have been a western Iranian perception of Cyrus whose echoes we find in the Graeco-Roman sources. There are three detailed versions of the story of Cyrus the great ultimately going back to Herodotus' *Histories*, Ctesias' *Persica* and Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. While their purpose and explanatory cadre might have contributed to their widely divergent accounts, their sources came from oral Iranian tradition, which must have great variety. In oral traditions, such as the western Iranian tradition concerned here, while the pattern of a story might be similar, various themes may be elaborated or left out (Lord, 1974: 109). In addition, themes can move from one story-pattern to another (ibid: 123). Hence, each of the three authors had the opportunity of appealing to different variants of the Cyrus' legends. Therefore, we will study the legends of Cyrus considering their oral nature. Legends of Cyrus must have been composed using fixed elements of subject-matter, diction and style adopted and harmonized with fresh improvisation. Putting these stories into the western Iranian context enables us to distinguish Iranian elements leveraged for different ends.

Herodotus (1.107-123) recounts one version of origin of Cyrus that he considered



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most reliable: After having a dream that the magi interpreted as a prediction that his grandson would take his throne, Astyages summoned his pregnant daughter Mandane from Persia to kill her son Cyrus upon his birth. Astyages gave this task to one of his courtiers, Harpagus, who turned the infant over to a shepherd of Astyages, named Mithridates. The shepherd and his wife decided to raise Cyrus in place of their own stillborn son. The young Cyrus was then recognized as the king's grandson following a dispute in which Cyrus played the role of the king with others of his age. Assuming the prophecy had already come true, Astyages sent him back to his parents to Persia.

The story of Ctesias (apud Nicolaus Damascenus, FGrH 90 F66; cf. Diodorus IX.22) makes Cyrus a non-Achaemenid from the nomadic Mardi people (of possible Elamite origin, Potts, 2005: 23), whose father Atradata (cf. Agradates, the name of Cyrus before his reign, Strabo 15.3.6) was a bandit out of poverty, while his mother Argoste, herded goats. Then the young Cyrus made his way into Astyages' court and went over a series of jobs in a variety of palace functions and administrative posts. At last, Cyrus served as wine pourer for the king's table companions. In this function Cyrus drew the attention of Astyages. Then, he became the chief cupbearer after the death of the holder of this position who adopted Cyrus. Consequently, Cyrus summoned his parents to the court, where he hears the dream of her mother while pregnant with him. In the dream, Argoste urinated so much that a flood swept over all Asia. Meanwhile, he managed to make his father ruler of Persia. Meanwhile, Astyages gave his daughter in marriage to a Median grandee by the name of Spitamas with all of Media as a dowry. When the king sent Cyrus to suppress a revolt, he instead rebelled with Persians and seized the Median throne. Ctesias (apud Photius, Bibliotheca 72) gives further details on capturing Astyages. Astyages fled from Cyrus to Ecbatana and hid himself in the vaults of the royal palace with the aid of his daughter Amytis and her husband Spitamas. Upon his arrival, Cyrus ordered to torture not only Spitamas and Amytis, but also their children Spitakes and Megabernes, enquiring into the whereabouts of Astyages. However, he gave himself up so the children would not be tortured. He was bound in heavy chains but was freed shortly afterwards by Cyrus and honored as a father. Amytis who for a while was honored like a mother by Cyrus, eventually became his wife since Spitamas was executed for lying about Astyages.



Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* I.2.1) agrees with Herodotus on the point that Cyrus' mother was Mandane, daughter of Astyages. However, *Cyropaedia* illustrates a romantic narration of Cyrus establishing his empire while still obedient of the Median king, Astyages. Though his maternal uncle, Cyaxares son of Astyages is supposed to succeed the grandfather, the achievements of Cyrus made him to become king. When Cyaxares' daughter placed the crown on Cyrus' head, he announced her to be Cyrus's wife and the kingdom as a dowry (*Cyropaedia* VIII.5.18-19).

Legends of the death of Cyrus are also diverse. According to Herodotus (I.201 ff.), Cyrus was captured and killed during war with nomads beyond Araxes (most probably Jaxartes) River. Cyrus initiated this war by his belief in his superhuman status and invincibility. He also believed that due to the divine care for him, all that is coming is shown to him beforehand. According to *Cyropaedia* (VIII.7), Cyrus learned from a dream that his time had come. He saw a god in a dream who told him, "Make ready, Cyrus; for you shall soon depart to the gods". Cyrus then climbed to an altar on a high mountain and sacrificed to gods. Afterwards, he gave a sermon to the nobles and advised his sons and then died in peace. Ctesias' account is essentially an amalgam of death on battlefield and in bed. Cyrus was wounded at war with nomads, but he survived long enough to return to Persia and die in peace. Even though the narrative structures of Cyrus' last campaign in the accounts of Herodotus and Ctesias are similar, seemingly against the depiction of *Cyropaedia*, the existence of these tales can point to diverse viewpoints on Cyrus the great among western Iranians.

To explore possible diverse western Iranian viewpoints on Cyrus the great, the literary genre, and the intention of the three accounts are to be considered. Herodotus outlines the integral drama of the conqueror of the potentate spectacularly raised and then humiliated and destroyed by providence. Ctesias' version converts the tragedy into romance, expressing the aesthetic frames and including the fabulous, the absurd, the exotic and the abject categories. Hence, Cyrus is of a humble origin and his social ascension is unfolded throughout a great number of adventures. Eventually he dies in great honor and finds his peace among his family. In *Cyropaedia*, we see the quest for a personality



instilled with proper ethical and political virtues. Indeed, *Cyropaedia* is ruled by the ideological convention, subordinating fictional elements to its specific requirement. As such, Cyrus is raised in a perfect harmony between Persians and Medes and the destiny of Cyrus is reshaped by the ethical parable, hence illustrating the ethical and political theses that are intended to be demonstrated. In sum, Herodotus represents Cyrus as the conqueror of the potentate, while Ctesias conforms him into a romantic adventurer and Xenophon in his turn provides an ethical and idealized ruler (Cizek, 1975).

The differences of the three images of Cyrus given by Herodotus, Ctesias and Xenophon can be explained at first glance in the context of the Greek literary tradition. Herodotus draws from the same tragic conception as his contemporary, Aeschylus. Indeed, similar attitudes and structures exist both in Persae and the corresponding text of Herodotus. While Cyrus's birth parallels the myth of the divine hybrid such as Dionysus or Hercules, Herodotus' choice of the most convincing version of Cyrus' death reveals a subjective way commensurate with the model of the Aeschylean Attic dramas. On the other hand, Ctesias' account marks the evolution of letters at the beginning of the 4th century BCE when drama and historiography were on the wane while the romance was still in an embryonic phase. Simultaneously, the decline of polis institutions calling for the establishment of ethical and political virtues provides grounds for the genesis and structure of *Cyropaedia*. Therefore, the three versions of the life of Cyrus illustrate the way historiography allows the conversion of data in accordance with a convention progressively distanced from the initial sources (Cizek, op. cit.).

Bearing in mind the central differences of the imagery of different accounts and the basic reasons behind these differences in the literary tradition helps us distinguish some specific elements and themes these accounts selected presumably from the western Iranian oral tradition. In contrast to Herodotus' tragic scheme, Ctesias' account could have incorporated diverse legends to be included into his romance, while *Cyropaedia* would appeal to exemplified rulers. Their similar elements on the other hand can point to an already constructed image in western Iran. In what follows, we focus on the similarities as well as differences in the accounts regarding the



various elements derived presumably from the western Iranian tradition.

The connection of Cyrus the great to the Median court is a well-established legend and appears in different forms in the accounts. The story of the marriage between the Persian king Cambyses I and Mandane and Cyrus' birth from this marriage is historically doubtful. This story serves the purpose to construct a direct relation between the royal houses of Media and Persia (Brosius, 1996: 42-45). The persistence of this legend evident in *Histories* and *Cyropaedia* can point to a well-established theme in western Iran which could be implemented in different literary genres. In addition, while we consider the Median orientation in all the accounts, the version of *Cyropaedia* reveals modifications within a possible Median milieu. In this version, a fictitious Cyaxares son of Astyages serves to provide a peaceful transition of power from Median royal house to the Persians. Such modifications rationalize dynastically Cyrus' kingship over the Medes and their incorporation into the Persian Empire. It is possible that here Xenophon purposefully adopted a Median perspective which accords well with the intended demonstration of *Cyropaedia*. On the other hand, the conflicting legends of origin of Cyrus reported by contemporary Ctesias and Xenophon seem to come from different circles (Beckman 2018). When we read the *Cyropaedia* and the *Anabasis* together, it becomes clear that Cyrus the Younger was equating himself with his namesake, a Cyrus reborn to lead the empire back to its glorious days. Against such portrayal, the campaign of Artaxerxes II might have attempted to undermine the reputation and glory of Cyrus the great to some extent. Consequently, Ctesias might have taken such representation which suits well with his adventurous imagery. Therefore, we should consider the possibility that the Greek versions of the story of rise of Cyrus the great are probably manipulation of facts to suit the ideologies of different factions in the Achaemenid period, from Darius I down to the reign of Artaxerxes II.

The death story of Cyrus is another point of possible diverse extractions from the western Iranian oral tradition. Herodotus' account agrees well with his conception of historical causality and tragedy. The hybris, the river and the sober-living people beyond the river are recurrent elements in Herodotus' reports on expeditions of Persian kings (Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1985: 464). Yet, it is possible that the core of the legend originated in an



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Iranian milieu. Moreover, there is a point in the legend that points to the reign of Darius the great. Before his capture, Cyrus dreamed that he saw Darius, the eldest son of Achaemenid Hystaspes, with a pair of wings covering both Europe and Asia. Indeed, Cyrus' dream predicts that he will die, and Darius will become king. This preemptive absolution for the eventual coup can only have come from Darius' court. Therefore, in Herodotus' version we see a distorted narrative of Cyrus' death by Darius to depict that Cyrus had lost divine favor and put the empire at risk and then Darius reorganized the empire again (Beckman, 2018: 5, 7). Hence, undermining the memory of Cyrus the great in favor of Darius might have been partially in place at the time of Darius. Meanwhile, Xenophon's idealized account accords with the propaganda of glorifying Cyrus the Great in favor of Cyrus the Younger. Ctesias' account of the final days of Cyrus the Great beside its romantic elements served to challenge his legitimacy in a similar or perhaps more pronounced way as that of Herodotus'. As Beckman (2018: 9-12) argued, Ctesias' version might have originated from propaganda of Artaxerxes II against his brother. On the other hand, both accounts of Xenophon and Ctesias emphasize the importance of loyalty between royal brothers, which probably emanate from the contemporary rivalry between Cyrus the Younger and Artaxerxes II.

Putting the legends of Cyrus the great in their western Iranian context in which they came to appear gives us the insight that some legendary motifs can be used for different reasons. Darius could appeal to his audience's fear, by telling them that Cyrus had lost divine favor, and put the empire at risk and he was divinely chosen to set the empire back on its proper footing. Recognizing that Herodotus' account of Cyrus probably emanated from Darius' court can help us better understand the imagery of the last Median king. The general outline of Herodotus' account reveals a rendering, which alienates the Median sovereign. While Darius relied on some Medes in his efforts to quell the revolts all over the Empire, the great revolts in Media and Sagartia with their leaders attempting to connect to the royal house of Media can explain the negative representation of the last Median monarch in this version. On the other hand, Artaxerxes II's propaganda probably personated Cyrus descending from a non-noble family, undermining his glories in response to Cyrus the Younger's representation of the glorious





conquests and wisdom of Cyrus the great. In addition, we may also note that Ctesias' legends, albeit with some innovations that by themselves could have been drawn from various western Iranian legends, were essentially coming from the same sources as those of Herodotus', in which the negative representation of the last Median Monarch is persistent. In contrast to accounts of Herodotus and Ctesias, we face a specifically Median bias in Xenophon's recount of life of Cyrus the great which was directly suitable for Xenophon's scheme. Due to its favorable attitudes towards the Medes, *Cyropaedia* seems to have appropriated a Median perspective on the foundation of the Persian Empire. In sum, we should appreciate the Persian-Median dichotomy regarding the legends of Cyrus the great.

Legends of Cyrus the great as reported by Herodotus, Ctesias and Xenophon must have been originally developed in Persian as well as perhaps Median circles in western Iran. These circles were under the influence of not only the Avestan tradition, but also the Mesopotamian tradition. In particular, the birth legends of Cyrus as elaborated in Greek sources has some elements of the so-called Sargon legend (Kuhrt, 2003). Therefore, in order to find specifically Avestan elements and themes, at first we need to distinguish the Mesopotamian elements.

Sargon's extensive conquests and his foundation of a new political order made him the subject of many stories. The birth legend of Sargon of Agade begins with his parents. While his mother was a high priestess, implying that she was of royal birth, his father's kinsmen lived in the mountains. Sargon's birth was shameful for his mother. As such, she placed him in a basket and let it float down the Euphrates. A humble gardener found the basket who adopted Sargon. At some stage, Sargon rose to become the cup-bearer of king of Kish in northern Babylonia. The king then was killed, and Sargon gradually became a universal king, penetrating to the edges of the world. While this folktale was in circulation, a version of this legend was fostered during the reign of Assyrian Sargon II in the later Assyrian period. In this version, the theme of infant exposure was used to present Sargon as a royal figure who miraculously regains his rightful position (for references see Kuhrt, 2003: 350-2). Legends of Sargon substantially influenced the



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later legendary traditions including those of Cyrus the great.

There are several comparable elements between legends of Cyrus according to Herodotus and Ctesias and the Sargon story. In Herodotus' account, the highlighted status of the mother and the less significant father, the rescue and adoption of the child by a lowly man and the planned exposure of the child, even though it was not carried out, are points of similarities (cf. Herodotus I.122; Justin I.4). In Ctesias' account, Cyrus' first patron, which was a gardener as well as his final position that is the cup-bearer of the king are closely comparable. The common elements of these two versions with the two different versions of Sargon's story and their prominence in Nabonidus' reign suggest that there might have been a deliberate fostering of an elision between the two kings by the Persians (Kuhrt, 2003: 354-5). Hence, as Kuhrt notes, the figure of Sargon of Agade merged with that of Cyrus, so that the Persian victor came to be identified with this Mesopotamian hero of antiquity as the true king of the universe.

The common elements of the legends of Cyrus and that of Sargon show an example of the assimilation of Cyrus into a conquered culture. Such assimilation could well have happened for the Iranian audience of the Persian Empire, especially after its Iranian tendencies by Darius the great onward.

## Assimilation of Cyrus the Great with the Iranian Tradition

In this section, first we discuss the introduction of Avestan texts to Persis as well as the question of the transmission of Avestan mythology and legends. Then the Avestan tradition is analyzed with a focus on the figure Kauui Haosrauuah which provide grounds for a discussion on possible assimilation of Cyrus the great with this Avestan figure.

The whole complex "Avesta" in the Achaemenid Persis is still far from being understood. Still, we take the working hypothesis that the accumulation of evidence makes it likely that the Avestan tradition was present in early Achaemenid Persis. Some religious terminologies of Achaemenid western Iran such as the theonym \*Naryasanga- and the term \*Dainamazdāyasnīš are most probably borrowings from Avestan (Cantera, 2017: 35-40, 47-48). The traditional pronunciation of Avestan texts has characteristics in



common with Old Persian (Hoffmann, 1979: 89-93; Hoffman & Narten, 1989, 41f.; 67f.; Cantera, 2017: 40-43). In addition, the generalization of the Mazdean liturgical calendar can only be understood if the liturgy for which and with which the calendar was developed was itself celebrated in Persis (Cantera, 2017: 51-60). It is possible that under Darius or Xerxes, the Avestan liturgy for AhuraMazdā was imported to Persis which was not the Persian but the Iranian form of worship. This introduction must have been aimed for promoting the unity among the Persians and Medes as well as probably other Iranians. In particular, the supra-country proto-national ethnic Iranian identity evident in the Avestan texts was probably attractive for Darius (Irannejad, 2022). The cultural affinity of the Persian elite of Iranian descent with northern Iranians, prominently the Medes among others, could become strengthened by adhering to the Avestan rituals and tradition.

The presence of Avestan texts and performance of their rituals in Achaemenid Persis can potentially point to the transmission of Avestan mythology and legends. The later inclusion of Miθra and Anahitā in the inscription of Artaxerxes II makes the performance of the Bayān Yašt ceremony at the court possible. In this ceremony Yašt 5, 19, 14 and 10 are recited among the Old Avestan texts with Ābān and Mehr Yašts taking the opening and closing positions (Cantera, 2017: 60). These Yašts are imbued with myths and epics that are marked Iranian par excellence. Moreover, personal names such as \*Apiva- (Av. Aipi.vohu-), \*Kav-usadan- (cf. Av. Kauui Usađan-) and \*Šyāvaršan- (cf. Av. Siiāuuaršan-) (Tavernier, 2007: 109, 232, 319) along with royal prominence of \*Ršan- probably bear witness to the circulation of legends of Kauuis. It is possible that at this time, the Persians began to identify with these myths and epics (cf. Yarshater, 1983: 389-391).

The Avestan tradition depicts a dualistic mytho-epic time-evolution for Iranians. The first millennium of world history is the golden age of Yima's dominion (Yt. 9.10; 17.30). The second millennium witnesses the hegemony of evil in face of Aži Dahāka. Ōraētaona Slaying Aži Dahāka inaugurates the third millennium, which is the period of admixture of good and evil. The final victory of Iranians headed by Kauui Haosrauuah over nomadic Tūirias is the ultimate victory of good over evil (Yt. 19). In this scheme, a legendary



dynasty of Kauuis, called Kayanids, which could well have been historical, going back to the late second millennium BCE (see arguments recently by Irannejad, 2020), are laid at the climax of the temporal evolution.

To consider the possibility of identification of Cyrus the great with Kauui Haosrauuah, we should investigate the ancient legends of Kauui Haosrauuah in the Avestan tradition. In other words, we are to find an archaic epos whose fragments have been preserved by Avestan allusions. Rather the detailed epic is only found in the texts of the early Islamic Iran, in particular the Middle Persian literature, the New Persian *Šāh-nāma* of Ferdowsi and other Perso-Arabic literature. During the long time of transmission of the Kayanid circle, large quantities of younger tradition material, in particular tales of Parthian heroes were attached to it (Boyce, 1954, 1957). Even though we can disregard the clear Parthian interpolations, the large temporal gap between the Avestan and late Sasanian periods poses a significant chronological difficulty. Notwithstanding, we will attempt to reconstruct the relevant Kayanid legends that form a coherent narrative commensurate with the Avestan allusions, hence antedating the Achaemenid period.

Kauui Haosrauuah is mentioned a few times in the Avestan texts showing different aspects of his significance. The divine plant-derived juice Haoma captured Fraŋrasiīān the Tūiriia and led him bound to Kauui Haosrauuah for him to kill by Lake Caēcasta as filial revenge (Av. puθrō.kaēna) for his father Kauui Siiāuuaršan (Yt. 9.17-23; without the intervention of Haoma, Yt. 5.49-50; 19.77, 92-93; cf. Dēnkard VII.1.39). The Middle Persian tradition (e.g. Greater Bundahišn 18.12) relates that Kay Husrōy had destroyed an idol-temple at Lake Čēčist identified with Lake Urmia and set the fire-cult instead that is Ādur Gušnasp. According to Mas'ūdī (Pellat, 1965, II: 1400), Kōsrow I Anōšīravān transformed this Sanctuary from an idol-temple to a fire-temple. Noting the aniconic nature of Avestan ideology and that idols and cultic structures are completely absent from the East Iranian Avesta, we can conclude that Anōšīravān's action was projected to his antique namesake. Nevertheless, there might have been an impetus for such projection originated from the Achaemenid period (see below). Beside the encounter with Fraŋrasiīān, Kauui Haosrauuah appears in a chariot race



and fight in the pan-Iranian razura (Yt. 5.50, cf. 15.32; note also Yt. 5.53-55 that he is followed by the firm charioteer Tusa is depicted in conflict with the Tūirias). Beside these two epic depictions, he appears in veneration of the divine fire who is called the charioteer, i.e. warrior, abundant with glory (Sī-rōzag 1.9=2.9). Here Kauui Haosrauuah is associated with the Kayanid and Iranian glory as well as Lake Haosrauuahja (probably alluding to capturing of Fraŋrasiān, cf. Yt. 19.56), Lake Caēcasta and Mount Asnuuant (cf. the mountainous milieu of his occultation, see below). This appearance which is built upon the association of fire with the glory as well as probably the warrior aspect of fire probably gave rise to his association in the Middle Persian tradition with the post-Avestan fire-temples. Furthermore, we have a great eulogy about him with references to his strength, victory, superiority, defeating opponents and specially his luminous xšaθra- implying his royal character (Yt. 13.133-135, cf. Yt. 19.74-76; Malandra, 2018: 112-113; Humbach & Ichaporia, 1998: 52-3). He epitomizes being disease-free and death-free (AZ 7) which could be an allusion to his occultation (see below). He is also exemplified as aṣəm mərəncō (VYt. 2) whose meaning is obscure; but it probably refers to him as being blessed (cf. below). Overall, Kauui Haosrauuah appears to be the glorious figure of Iranians whose deeds and memories contribute to the Avestan hymnic composition.

The Avestan formula arša airiianam daxiunam xšaθrai haṅkərəmō haosrauuā (Yt. 5.49, 15.32) seems to be Kauui Haosrauuah's unique standing epithet. He is arša- "the hero" of Iranian countries that arranges xšaθra- in view of date. Linked to the past by the virtues of arša-, widespread in the onomastics of his ancestors, Haosrauuah had the specific task of providing the Iranian peoples with xšaθra- of which this is the first manifestation since primordial kings (Kellens, 2016: 132). An alternative translation would be "arša- of Iranian peoples who exercised xšaθra- and thus maintained the arrangement within the Iranian peoples" (Pirart: 2010: 68, 114). Av. xšaθra- in agreement with its Indian cognate kṣatra- as well as the later Iranian linguistic evidence signifies power, that is temporal but also of spiritual provenance (note the contrast of xšaθra- and daēnā-, Vd. 2.4-5; contra Kellens, 1999-2000: 727; also, Kellens 2016: 135 and Pirart 2010: 28, 68, 355, who suggested a ritual interpretation of xšaθra-). Simultaneously, Avestan evidence leans toward



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a royal significance of kauui associated with xšaθra- in agreement with the later Iranian evidence (Schwartz, 2013; Irannejad, 2020). The formula has the variant with haṅkərətō “put together” (Yt. 9.21) which aligns well with the main formula and the later tradition depicting Kay Husrōy as the consolidator of Iranian kingdom with xšaθra- signifying the temporal power.

Comparison of the legendary Yašts, the Middle Persian tradition and the Šāh-nāma reveals the homogeneity that reigns through them regarding the Kayanid saga. According to the Middle Persian tradition, Kay Husrōy is the offspring of the exogamy of Siyāwaxš and Višpān-Fryā, daughter of Frāsiyāg/ Frāsiyāb (Bundahišn 35.21; Farīgīs/Farangīs in Šāh-nāma, ed. Khaleghi, II: 482). Siyāwaxš went to the land of Turān for fight and then was killed by Frāsiyāg (Bundahišn 33.10). Šāh-nāma has Kay Kōsrow born in Turān in the house of Pīrān after the execution of his father. Pīrān entrusted him to herdsmen, and he is raised in exile. At his youth, Kay Kōsrow fled to Iran along with his mother to appear before his paternal grandfather (Šāh-nāma, ed. Khaleghi, II: 295-307, 343-75, 422-48). Kay Kōsrow then goes into battle with Afrāsiāb and consolidates the kingdom while his grandfather is still king and he becomes king only upon the death of his grandfather (ed. Khaleghi, IV: 325-27). According to Bundahišn (33.11), he went to the Kang-diz after killing Frāsiyāb. This summary seems to constitute the main lines of the account of Kauui Haosrauuah that might have been known in the Avestan society.

The unification of (western) Iranians by Cyrus the great parallels the consolidation of Iranian countries by Kauui Haosrauuah. Such parallelism might have led different western Iranian circles to identify Cyrus with Kauui Haosrauuah as the great hero of Iranian antiquity. According to Christensen (1936: 114), we can find the salient features of the story of the youth of Cyrus here and there in the later Iranian legends. These features include the dream that announces the fall of a reign and the advent of another (Dahāg, Frēdōn, Ardašīr); the not executed order to kill a newborn child (Kay Kōsrow); the exposure of the child (Kay Kawād, Dārāy); the child raised among shepherds or other common people (Frēdōn, Kay Kōsrow, Dārāy, Ardašīr); and the superior spirit of the child who betrays himself in games and exercises (Kay Kōsrow, Ardašīr). He concludes that these



features are a series of common ancient Iranian patterns. However, keeping the dream motif aside, a scrutiny of the stories of Cyrus the great and consideration of the evolution of oral Iranian tradition gives us insight into the antiquity and direction of borrowings between legends as well as their possible interactions leading specifically to legends of Kauui Haosrauuah.

The motif of exposure of the child is a key component of the legends of Sargon. It is associated with the change of dynasties and a major shift of power. The Middle Persian literature, which attributes the establishment of kingship in Iran to Kay Kawād (Dēnkard VII.1.33) qualifies him with such legend. Accordingly, Kay Kawād was abandoned in a basket (kēwūd) on a river and, when it was caught in the reeds, was found by Uzaw (Bundahišn 31.23). The Perso-Arabic literature does not mention this origin story. Instead, they ascribe a similar story to Dārāy. When Dārāy was born his mother did not reveal the news of his birth but had him laid, together with precious jewels, in a casket and exposed on a river. A fuller or a miller found the child (Tafāẓzoli, 1994). An important source in this regard is Dārāb-nāma, which represents an oral tradition that transmitted the stories of later Achaemenid kings as the last Kayanid kings. Dārāb-nāma also includes legends of Alexander as an integral part of the Kayanid saga: Alexander's mother gives birth to him in secret and to avoid a scandal, she leaves him on the mountain where Aristotle lives in a retreat. Eventually an old woman finds the infant, who nourishes him and rears him under the guidance of Aristotle (ed. Šafā, 1344=1965, I: 390 f.). We may note that in contrast to the stories of Cyrus in which the exposure motif is meagerly present, the legends of Kay Kawād, Dārāy and Alexander have strong parallelism with the legends of Sargon in this regard. Nevertheless, the similarity of birth legends of Dārāy and Alexander to that of Sargon in the Iranian context may well have been a result of assimilation of Cyrus the great to that of Cyrus the younger under his father Darius II on the one hand and equivalence of Alexander and Cyrus the great in the Iranian tradition (see below and forthcoming publication).

The similarity of the legends of Cyrus according to Ctesias to that of Ardašīr is indeed striking. The hero (Cyrus/Ardašīr) is a shepherd's son; the dream of his parents prophesizes his future greatness. In his youth, he arrives at the court in Media and must be here by a peculiar fateful fate to do servant



services. The plot reaches its height with the flight of the hero to his home Persis. From the horse stable, where he has done lowly services, Ardašīr steps into his escape leading him to rule. Similarly, when Cyrus makes up his mind to fall away from Astyages, he meets the Persian Oibara, carrying horse manure in a basket, and that is what he says good omen interpreted, since horse manure means wealth and power. Gutschmid (1892: 133-4) who pointed out these parallelisms, plausibly assumed that the legends of Cyrus as the founder of the first Persian Empire might have been transferred to the founder of the second Persian Empire.

Therefore, what appears to be common ancient Iranian patterns are rather traceable in terms of interactions with the Mesopotamian legends as well as the temporal evolution of the developed legends in western Iran. Having distinguished this evolution, we now consider the parallels between legends of origin and demise of Cyrus the great with that of Kay Kōsrow. In doing so, we take into consideration the possible Persian-Median dichotomy or rather the various Greek narratives in different accounts of legends of Cyrus which enables us to distinguish diverging parallels to the legends of Kay Kōsrow.

The story of birth and upbringing of Cyrus the great in Herodotus' Histories parallels with those of Kay Kōsrow. In both cases, an alien/alienated king (Afrāsīyāb-Astyages) orders an Iranian prince (Cyrus- Kay Kōsrow) and the son of his own daughter (Farangīs-Mandane) to be slain. Nevertheless, with the help of a courtier (Pirān-Harpagus), he is saved and is brought up among shepherds and later overcomes his maternal grandfather (Yarshater, 1983: 388-9). The dream of Astyages also has the parallel with the dream of Afrāsīyāb in the eve of the war with the Iranian troops (ed. Khaleghi, II: 248 f.; 300, 367). Details of capturing Astyages given by Ctesias reveals some other parallels with the legend of capturing of Afrāsīyāb by Kay Kōsrow. In Šāh-nāma (ed. Khaleghi, IV: 300 f.), Afrāsīyāb first fled to the town of Kang fortress. Kay Kōsrow in his pursuit reaches the town and kills many of his relatives. Then, having realized that Afrāsīyāb had hidden in Lake Čičast, Kay Kōsrow orders his brother Karsivaz to be tortured. Consequently, Afrāsīyāb gave himself up only to be slain by Kay Kōsrow. In these stories, Cyrus the great is similar to Kay Kōsrow against the alienated Median monarch.



The fantastic outline of Cyroaedia also parallels the legends of Kay Kōsrow but in another perspective. Here, the deeds of Cyrus parallel those of Kay Kōsrow under the kingship of his grandfather Kāvus and enmity is targeted towards Assyrians and the transfer of power is narrated via the peaceful rivalry with his uncle which parallels the story of Kay Kōsrow's uncle Farīborz (Šāh-nāma, ed. Khaleghi, II: 456-67). The name Farīborz is a modification of Borzāfarah (Mojmal al-tawārīk, ed. Bahār, 1318=1939: 29), which we can compare with Barzapharnes, a Parthian general under Pacorus (Flavius Josephus I.11). Hence, his significance is a Parthian interpolation, while the story pattern might be old. The short account of Aeschylus seems to be also in-line with the narrative of Xenophon. In these versions, the last Median Monarch is not the enemy, but the grandfather and the legitimate ruler that cherishes Cyrus, and the transition of power to Cyrus is peaceful with the memory of the Median monarchs commemorated.

The striking similarities of the legends of Kay Kōsrow and Cyrus the great about their origin and rise to power in the accounts of Herodotus and Ctesias on one side and in Cyropaedia (and Aeschylus) on the other are two different instances of assimilation of the Kayanid legends and that of Cyrus. The components of Kayanid legends about the birth and rise to power of Kay Kōsrow coherently form a legendary narrative. The two instances of parallels of Cyrus' origin with those of Kay Kōsrow make it clear that some legends of the latter were used in the legends of the former. This observation indicates that in some Iranian circles, in Media and Persia, there probably was a conscious process of assimilation of Cyrus the great with the Kayanid distinguished king during the Achaemenid period in which Cyrus is intentionally likened to Kay Kōsrow.

In order to investigate this assimilation process further, we consider the death stories of Cyrus the great in comparison to those of the demise of Kay Kōsrow. There are several common interdependent motifs present in various stories of Cyrus and those of Kay Kōsrow in this respect. First, we review the available information about the disappearance of Kay Kōsrow and then we single out the parallels with the events surrounding the death of Cyrus the great.

According to Šāh-nāma (ed. Khaleghi, IV: 327), after sixty years of reign, Kay Kōsrow wishes to ascend toward god. Then the god's messenger Soruš appears



to him in a dream and tells him his wish has been accepted and he is to elect a successor. After giving a sermon, he ascends from the material world to the spiritual one. A few of his paladins including Tus and others of clearly Parthian interpolation accompany him to a spring. In the middle of the night, he does ablution in the spring and then everyone sleeps. The next day when the paladins wake up, they realize Kay Kōsrow has disappeared. In addition to Šāh-nāma, there is a version of the story of Kay Kōsrow called the blessed in a passage in the Chester Beatty Manichean Kephalia codex (see BeDuhn, 2015). At some point, Kōsrow is depicted in conversation with one of his lieutenants, Vēžan son of Gēv (Wēw, Biy), and apparently foreseeing disaster for Vēžan that “you will not reach Persia”. On the other hand, Kay Kōsrow yields up his kingdom and departs into some transcendental realm. A sage named Danaan, son of Danaan (Dāna Dānayana? cf. Yt. 19.41) is speaking to the king in his military camp, somewhere on campaign outside of Persia. Danaan has led the king to the tree of ambrosia. From this treasure tree, Kōsrow receives gifts, treasures, and glory. Then Kōsrow and Danaan are said to have gone up to the land of light.

Legends of occultation of Kay Kōsrow do not have an Avestan precedence. The inclusion of Vēžan son of Gēv clearly is a Parthian interpolation. Nonetheless, there are some clues to some Avestan allusions regarding the occultation of Kauui Haosrauuah (AZ 7). According to contents of the lost Avestan Sūdgar Nask (apud Dēnkard IX.23.1-8), close to renovation Kay Husrōy subdues Wāy who is responsible for death of people in the past (cf. Zādspram 35.6). Here, the idea of an undying hero is at work (Vevaina, 2015: 180). According to Dēnkard (VII.1.40), Kay Husrōy was needed as an instrument for the renovation and thus he moved on to a secret place for his body to be kept until the renovation. This secret place is said to be at Kang fortress on a mountain between Iran and Turān (Dēnkard VIII.1.40). Therefore, some lines of the story of occultation of Kay Kōsrow could go back to the (late) Avestan period.

Given its early Sasanian date, the reference of Chester Beatty Manichean Kephalia gives us an important insight regarding the evolution of the story of Kay Kōsrow. The localization of this legend is important for our investigation. The Kephalia text further mentions that Vēžan went astray among mountains and storms (?) that occurred there. This fate agrees

with the legend of Šāh-nāma in which Vēžan and several other knights of Kay Kōsrow die in a snowstorm as they try to follow him into the mountains. Hence, we are dealing with a mountainous area. An important clue is given regarding the tree that is associated with the elixir of immortality. It may have connections with Tree of Antidotes or Tree opposed to harm as well as white Haoma, Av. gaokerena (Yt. 12.17; Vd. 20.4; Budhaišn 27.4, 30.25). The tree motif which is absent in the later Iranian tradition is not probably a Manichaean addition either and must be original to the story (BeDuhn 2021). It seems that the ritual importance of plants in general and ephedra in particular was a common practice in mountainous areas of Central Asia bordering Xinjiang. The importance of Haoma was a distinguishing character for some of the Sakā people, called Haumavargā in Old Persian inscriptions (DNa 25, XPh 26, A3Pb 14). The plant Haoma is said to grow in the mountains in Indo-Iranian texts. As such, the mountain region from the Altai in the north to the Pamirs in the south is the most probable focal point for the origin of this cult (Narain, 1987). On the other hand, the Chester Beatty Kephalia codex first mentions Danaan son of Danaan immediately following a long passage on the Scythian sage Anacharsis. The Scythian name of Jaxartes River was Danu (Arrian, Anabasis 3.28.3) after the water stream goddess and thus Danaan could represent a theophoric name connected to Danu. Thus, the legend of occultation of Kay Kōsrow occurs somewhere in the mountainous area of Transoxiana reaching probably the Jaxartes River.

The continued threat of Sakā nomads to the northeastern borderlands of the Persian Empire had lasting impressions. A good deal of battle and triumph scenes from seals and sealings depict Persian victory over enemies wearing costumes typical for the nomadic Sakā (Wu, 2010: 557-560). The encounters of Cyrus the great with various nomadic people of northern East Iran brings him close to the Iranian epic tradition of facing nomadic Tūirias reflected in the Avestan texts. The Chester Beatty Kephalia text contextualizes Kay Kōsrow's disappearance in a military camp and proximity with nomads like what is told about Cyrus' death. Moreover, the standing of Amorges, king of the Sakā Haumavargā at the fatal battle of Cyrus against Derbices according to Ctesias provides parallels with the figure Danaan. In addition,



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the significance of Haoma ritual for these Sakā also counterparts the sacred tree in the Chester Beatty Kephalia text. Hence, both the localization and context of legends of Cyrus and Kay Kōsrow are similar.

There are other parallels between the stories of demise of Kay Kōsrow and different accounts of Cyrus' death that show a closer affinity. The appearance of a divine entity to Cyrus in Cyropaedia and Kay Kōsrow in the later Iranian tradition is quite similar. The divine favor and his foresight attributed to Cyrus are characteristics of Kay Kōsrow as well. The succession story is also similar. Just as Kay Kōsrow chooses the unknown Lohrāsp father of Goštāsp who is not received well in the beginning by the nobles, the dream of Cyrus predicted ascension of Darius son of Hystaspes whose throne initially was contested. Thus, different legends of fate of Cyrus and Kay Kōsrow have interdependent components.

In conclusion, appreciating the possible existence of Avestan tradition in the Achaemenid period enables us to see parallels between Greek sources and the Kayanid legends. There are similarities between different versions of origin, rise to power as well as death of Cyrus the great and the legends about Kay Kōsrow. While appreciating their differences obviously arisen due to the western Iranian situation, we can think of a possible identification or rather association of Cyrus with Kauui Haosrauuh in the Achaemenid period. The Chester Beatty Kephalia explicitly called Kay Kōsrow king of Persia rather than Parthia or some other Iranian realm. This notion reveals that at least by the third or early fourth century CE, Kay Kōsrow had been integrated into the Persian tradition. Such integration might have started in the Achaemenid period.

### Interactions of Legends of Cyrus the Great with the Iranian tradition

Making Cyrus the great on par with Kauui Haosrauuh might have helped to assimilate the western Iranian monarchs and ancient Iranian kings and blurred their difference, ultimately influencing the later Iranian tradition of the Kayanids. This process might have started a two-way interaction between legends of Cyrus and Kauui Haosrauuh.





The succession arrangement of Median and Persian kings reported by Aeschylus is reminiscent of the arrangement of Kayanid kings in the national Iranian tradition. In Aeschylus's account, the two Median monarchs are portrayed like the Kayanid kings Kay Kawād and Kay Us (Kāvus), followed by Cyrus the great as Kay Kōsrow. If we consider a tendency on the side of western Iranians to liken the lines of Median monarchs together with internalized Cyrus to Kayanid kings, then we can better understand the parallels between the story of rise of Cyrus to power as depicted in *Cyropaedia* and the legends of Kay Kōsrow. Hence, it is highly possible that *Cyropaedia* has leveraged through his Iranian sources some of the fundamental components of the legends of Kauui Haosrauuah already set in western Iran for making of his Cyrus.

*Cyropaedia* with its possible Median perspective is not the only account that borrowed patterns and motifs from legends of Kauui Haosrauuah. The accounts of Herodotus and Ctesias, both presumably emanating from the Persian court, beginning at the time of Darius have also borrowed themes from the stories of Kauui Haosrauuah. These borrowings on the side of the Persians may speak to the interest of Darius in bringing unity of Persians and Medes yet alienating the Median royal house.

Interestingly, the poetic tradition about Cyrus the great that possibly borrowed some traits from the Kayanid legends in the Achaemenid period through time in turn affected those legends. In the version of the Kayanid legends according to Dīnawarī, Kāvus was dethroned after the arrival of Kay Kōsrow to Persia and was put in prison until his death (ed. Guirgass, 1888: 16). Such account contrasts with what we can infer from the Middle Persian literature and Šāh-nāma. If we consider the assimilation of Kay Kōsrow and Kāvus with Cyrus and Astyages, then it is not outside the realm of possibility that this account might have had a western Iranian origin. This assumption however does not have supporting evidence. Nevertheless, other pieces of evidence indicate a western Iranian context for some stories of the rather East Iranian Kayanid saga.

In the story of qualification of Kay Kōsrow as crown prince, having god-given glory, he destroyed a fortress occupied by dēvs “demons” and established there a new town centered on a magnificent fire temple and then tended for



a whole year (Šāh-nāma, ed. Khaleghi, II: 460-7). Despite the East Iranian focus of Kayanid legends, this episode is centered in Pārs (Persis): the point of departure of Kay Kōsrow is Eṣṭakr (environ of Persepolis) and he returned there after one year. The story of Šāh-nāma about the fortress of demons is the foundation myth for the western Iranian temple of Ādur Gušnasp at Šiz (Takt-e Solaymān, Azerbaijan). The earliest settlement at this place was a small and poor agglomeration of houses with stone socles and clay or mud brick walls. The pottery and few small finds such as three-winged bronze arrowheads and an elbow-shaped fibula allow dating this settlement into the Achaemenid period. Intramural burials were placed in the corners and next to the walls of the houses and courtyards in pits cut into the rocky ground and partly covered by benches or walls. The process of architectural transformation of the site into the renowned fire temple presumably began after the suppression of the Mazdakite movement under Sasanian Kōsrow I (Huff, 2002). It is then safe to assume that Kōsrow, attributed the first foundation of the temple to his namesake, the great Kayanid Kōsrow.

The story of qualification of Kay Kōsrow and the fortress of dēvs does not have an Avestan precedence and seem to originate from an Achaemenid milieu. The circumstances influencing his appointment as the crown prince seem to form the background of this story. We can find the main components of this narrative in the inscriptions of Xerxes (Jamzadeh, 2004). According to Xerxes, Darius had other sons, but by the grace of AhuraMazdā, Xerxes became the crown prince (XPh 4). On a separate occasion, Xerxes talks about destroying daivadāna “the den of demons” (XPh 5). Despite the timeless sense of the Daiva inscription of Xerxes, Daivas could point to archaic deities of inhabitants of Media other than Persia itself, since in the unidentified land of Daivadāna, worship of Daivas and Ahura Mazdā was current (Ghirshman, 1976: 6-9). The Achaemenid remains at the site of Ādur Gušnasp could outline a non-Mazdean religious practice due to its burials. It is possible that Daivadāna in Xerxes’ inscription could point to somewhere in Media, in particular to Šiz. Overall, the story of Kay Kōsrow about competition over the crown on conquering the fortress of demons is probably indebted to the narrative of Xerxes’ inscriptions.

The story of Kay Kōsrow about the fortress of demons has another detail,



which points to events under Cyrus the great and in turn makes Xerxes indebted to his maternal grandfather in his narrative. The letter of Kay Kōsrow dictated to a scribe to be placed on the fortress is a declaration to the world. The wording of this universal declaration echoes elements of Cyrus' cylinder inscription. The cylinder had been placed as a foundation deposit and instituted a restoration of the correct worship of Marduk (Davidson, 2018: 238-9). Therefore, Xerxes recalled the restoration of the correct worship as practiced by Cyrus and utilized it in his plot but in an Iranian milieu. Iranians then might have remembered it in the account of the original player, i.e. Cyrus the great, fully acclimated into the Kayanid legends as Kay Kōsrow.

While the Avestan legend of Fraŋrasiīān took place in an East Iranian content, Afrāsīāb's flight to a cave near Barda' in ancient Albania in Šāh-nāma transfers the scene of his final capture into a western Iranian locale (ed. Khaleghi, IV: 312-13). It is possible that this transfer was a faint reflection of a reworking of the original legend that conformed to the history of western Iran. The recount of the fight of the Medes with invading Scythians is reflected in Cyropaedia (III.2) as the conflict of Cyrus the great with roaming troop of plundering Chaldeans bordering Armenia. Cyrus founded a fortress as a protective measure in the mountains that mark the border of Armenia and Scythia. The anonymous Ḥudūd al-'ālam (ed. Sütüdeh, 1362=1983: 192) mentions a fortress in the mountain at Sarīr "throne" located in ancient Albania with a throne of red gold. In his account of Alexander, Nizāmī narrates that during soirees storytellers recited stories about Sarīr, informing him of the fortress in which Kay Kōsrow's throne resides (Šarafnāma, ed. Dastgirdi, re-ed. Ḥamīdiyān, 1378=1999: 324). In addition, Alexander visits the nearby cave of Kay Kōsrow and afterwards he faced a snowstorm that the paladins of Kay Kōsrow faced upon his disappearance (ibid: 337 f.). The cave of Afrāsīāb in Šāh-nāma and the cave of Kay Kōsrow in Nizāmī's account are conflations of the East Iranian legends transferred to western Iran. What appears to be an echo of a western Iranian reworking of the Avestan legend in Šāh-nāma, finds its details in Šarafnāma. Nizāmī's tales were probably based on secular oral tradition in his homeland Azerbaijan that is ancient Greater Media



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Atropatene. Furthermore, the fortress of Kay Kōsrow in Šarafnāma and its parallel in Cyropaedia indicate that this western Iranian transfer emerged within the context of the legends of Cyrus the great.

A hidden piece in the interactions of legends of Cyrus the great with those of Kay Kōsrow lies in the association in the later Iranian tradition made between Alexander and Kay Kōsrow. The next section discusses legends of Alexander in association with Cyrus the great in occidental sources versus legends of Alexander in connection to Kay Kōsrow in the Iranian tradition.

### Alexander, Cyrus, and Their Associations with the Iranian Tradition

An ironic feature of integration of legends of Alexander into the Iranian tradition is his assimilation with Kay Kōsrow. Dārāb-nāma (ed. Šafā, 1346=1967, II) links Alexander with the Iranian past by having him find Kay Kōsrow's treasure, having him kill a Central Asian king in revenge for the death of Siyāvaš as well as visiting Afrāsiāb's city and the Brazen Castle (Rōyēn Diž). In addition, in Niẓāmī's account of Dārā's final war, one of his counselors alludes to an old prophecy: before Kay Kōsrow's occultation, he used his magic cup to look into the future. Out of Greece shall come an arrogant ruffian who will conquer the entire land of Iran and then reign on the throne of the Kayanids (Šarafnāma, ed. Dastgirdi, re-ed. Ḥamidīyān, 1378=1999: 172–3.). In retrospect, Alexander finds Kay Kōsrow's magic cup in the throne fortress or Sarīr, whose secrets enabled the Greeks to invent the astrolabe (ibid: 335-6). Alexander sits on Kay Kōsrow's throne and drink wine from his cup. At this point, Niẓāmī compares Alexander's mirror with Kay Kōsrow's cup (ibid: 327-8). Hence, Alexander's mirror is analogous to the cup of Kay Kōsrow, later popularly known as goblet of Jam (Yima) that mirrors the unseen world in which reality is reflected. Furthermore, as Alexander approaches the confines of the known world, he confronts strange creatures and encounters supernatural phenomenon that similarly Kay Kōsrow met. Such parallelism then makes Alexander on par with Kay Kōsrow.

To understand the assimilation of Alexander with Kay Kōsrow in the Iranian tradition, we must appreciate the possible identification of Cyrus the great with Kay Kōsrow. The story of Alexander arriving at the throne fortress



parallels the episode of Alexander Romance in *Šāh-nāma* in which he reaches a palace made of topaz upon a high mountain (ed. Khaleghi, VI:100). This episode corresponds to an episode of the Greek version of Alexander Romance (Pseudo-Callisthenes III.28) in which he enters the royal palace of Cyrus, where he finds a golden throne and a large engraved golden mixing bowl. In addition, as Şafavī (1364=1985: 178) noted, Alexander's visit to the resting place of Kay Kōsrow in *Šarāfnāma* may actually be a reflection of a historical event, i.e. Alexander's visit to Cyrus' tomb. Thus, the association of Alexander and Kay Kōsrow, in fact speaks to the association of Alexander with Cyrus the great as well as the identification of the latter with Kay Kōsrow in the Iranian tradition.

The association of Alexander with Cyrus the great and ultimately Kay Kōsrow may reflect a shadow of Alexander's own Persianization propaganda. Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* was an important inspiration for Alexander, imitating Cyrus the great (Tatum, 1989: 238-9). Alexander deliberately connected himself with Cyrus, and echoes of Cyrus ring around Alexander (Mitchell, 2013: 101 with classical references). Alexander's later career reflects as much familiarity with Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* as with the *Anabasis*. According to Stark (1958: 203-210), some of the parallels between Arrian's account of Alexander and Xenophon's portrait of Cyrus, suggest a more direct connection between Alexander and the Cyrus of the *Cyropaedia*. Parallels between Books VII-VIII of Xenophon and Alexander's career after his defeat of Darius also reflect Arrian's intense devotion to his literary model Xenophon. In fact, Arrian borrowed many stylistic features from Xenophon's *Anabasis*. From Xenophon's Cyrus the Younger to Alexander and from Artaxerxes II to Darius III, the discursive connections are unequivocal: after implacable discourses of delegitimization, Artaxerxes II and Darius III were stripped of their status as Great Kings because of an irrevocable choice publicly expressed by their former comrades in arms (Briant, 2015: 139-146). Hence, as Jamzadeh (2012: 180) suggested, we may see in Iranian legends that make Alexander a half-brother of Dārā, echoes from Cyrus the Younger's rebellion who had challenged his brother Artaxerxes II. In sum, Alexander's propaganda and then his biographies, bearing some Persian traits, affected the Iranian perception of him as a half-Persian legitimate Iranian sovereign who is depicted indirectly on par with Cyrus the great identified with Kay Kōsrow.



## Conclusion

The narrative structure of legends of Cyrus the great as transmitted by Herodotus, Ctesias and Xenophon and the themes that are employed to give form to these patterns point to diverse viewpoints on Cyrus in the western Iranian milieu. By the time of Artaxerxes I and certainly by the middle of the Achaemenid period, i.e. Artaxerxes II, we hear of many versions of the stories of Cyrus. In addition, these accounts show that the older molds in the oral Iranian tradition were used to relate more recent events. Some of these versions independently have borrowed various motifs and patterns from legends of Kay Kōsrow. Adoption of Iranian legends for Cyrus might have been an attempt to internalize the rather “non-Iranian” element of Cyrus’ reign and his ancestors within the western Iranian circles of the Achaemenid Empire, whose elite was pushed toward an Iranian ideology following the accession of Darius the great on the Persian imperial throne. It seems that from the reign of Darius onward, some components of legends of Kay Kōsrow were leveraged in different stories about Cyrus in the western Iranian milieu. Such assimilation later resulted in a two-way interaction between legends attributed to Kay Kōsrow and Cyrus and possibly their fusion.

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■ Elham Yaghoubian

## *The “Jewish” Cyrus*

### Abstract

The history of Iran is an intricate mosaic intertwined with diverse cultures, religions, and rulers spanning countless centuries. Among the luminous figures emerging from this complex narrative, Cyrus the Great stands out as a unifying force. In this article, we explore the fascinating interplay between Cyrus the Great and the Jewish community, shedding light on his profound influence on Persian history and Judaism. Additionally, we delve into the remarkable accomplishment of how Jewish communities have preserved his memory throughout centuries of collective forgetfulness in Iran.

**Keywords:** Cyrus the Great, Iranian Jews, Diaspora, Achaemenids, Jewish Temple, Babylonia, Persia, Iran

Cyrus the Great, reigning over Persia from 559 to 530 BCE, left an indelible mark on history. His rule is celebrated for contributions to governance, human rights, and religious tolerance. A pivotal moment during his reign was the downfall of the Babylonian Empire and the subsequent decree permitting exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem, cementing his benevolence in history.

The earliest references to Cyrus the Great can be found in Jewish religious texts, where his name (in Hebrew: כּוֹרֶשׁ *koreš*) is revered and upheld. When it comes to historical records and inscriptions from his time, there are relatively few compared to other ancient rulers. The scarcity of contemporaneous sources can be attributed to factors such as the perishable nature of materials used for record-keeping in ancient Persia and



the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Macedonian, which could have led to the loss or destruction of some historical documents. Hence, Prior to the Parthian and Sassanid dynasties, there were limited records or historical traces of Cyrus. Yet, it was the Jewish communities that safeguarded his memory, ensuring that his name would not fade into obscurity.

In the Old Testament, specifically in the Book of Isaiah, the term used for Cyrus as “anointed” in Hebrew is “מְשִׁיחוֹ” (m’siḥo). is derived from the root word “מָשַׁח” (mašakh), which means “to anoint” or “to smear with oil.” In the context of Isaiah 45:1, Cyrus is referred to as “מְשִׁיחוֹ שֶׁל־אֲדֹנָי” (m’siḥo šel Adonai), meaning “His anointed one of the Lord” or “the Lord’s anointed.” This designation underscores the idea that Cyrus was chosen by God for a specific purpose, which was to facilitate the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon and to allow for the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

However, the designation of “anointed” (messiah) in this context does not necessarily equate Cyrus with the Messianic figure expected in Jewish eschatology. The concept of the Messiah in Jewish tradition refers to a future figure who will usher in a period of peace, redemption, and the ultimate realization of God’s kingdom on Earth. This Messianic expectation is distinct from Cyrus’s historical role, which was to facilitate the return of the exiles and allow for the reconstruction of the Temple.

The most notable reference to Cyrus in the Bible can be found in the Book of Isaiah, with several passages mentioning him. God describes Cyrus as His Chosen one. These titles and descriptions in the Book of Isaiah emphasize the idea that God chose Cyrus to fulfill His will, including allowing the Jewish exiles to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. This recognition by God is a unique instance in the Torah where a non-Jewish ruler is given such significance:

Isaiah 45:1, 2, 3 & 4<sup>1</sup>:

Thus said God to Cyrus, the Anointed one—Having grasped his right hand,

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<sup>1</sup>- The textual references from the Old Testament (Tanakh) are sourced from Sefaria: A Living Library of Torah Texts Online, which can be accessed at <https://www.sefaria.org/texts>.



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Treading down nations before him, Ungirding the loins of kings,  
Opening doors before him And letting no gate stay shut: I will march  
before you And level the hills that loom up; I will shatter doors of  
bronze And cut down iron bars. I will give you treasures concealed  
in the dark And secret hoards—So that you may know that it is I the  
Eternal One, The God of Israel, who call you by name. For the sake of  
My servant Jacob, Israel My chosen one, I call you by name, I hail you  
by title, though you have not known Me.

These titles and descriptions in the Book of Isaiah emphasize the idea that God chose Cyrus to fulfill His will, including allowing the Jewish exiles to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Furthermore, 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 give an elaboration on this event in even more details:

And in the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, when the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah was fulfilled, the Lord roused the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia to issue a proclamation throughout his realm by word of mouth and in writing, as follows: ‘This is what King Cyrus of Persia says: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up, and may the Lord their God be with them.

As previously mentioned, Cyrus the Great is often referred to as the Messiah. To grasp the significance of Cyrus as the Messiah, it is vital to explore the concept of the Messiah in Judaism. The Messiah is a prophesied figure sent by God to redeem and rescue the Jewish people. Cyrus's recognition as the Messiah underscores his exceptional role as a ruler who not only allowed the Jews to return to their homeland but actively facilitated the reconstruction of their sacred temple in Jerusalem. This display of support and religious freedom was unparalleled in ancient times, solidifying his status as a savior in Jewish belief.

Yet, Cyrus not only granted liberation to the Jewish people but also issued a decree that enabled them to reclaim the treasures King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Solomon's Temple, as detailed in 2 Kings 24:13:



He carried off from Jerusalem all the treasures of the House of God and the treasures of the royal palace; he stripped off all the golden decorations in the Temple of God—which King Solomon of Israel had made—as God had warned.

These recovered artifacts were pivotal for the subsequent reconstruction of the Second Temple, which became renowned as the “house of God.” Although only a small number of Jews initially answered Cyrus’s call to return to Jerusalem and Judea, his benevolent actions laid the foundation for their re-establishment in their homeland. In Ezra, the Bible records a list of what Cyrus returned with the exiles. These passages are significant because they describe Cyrus’s policy of allowing the Jewish exiles in Babylon to return to their homeland and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Here’s a brief explanation of what is written about Cyrus in the Book of Ezra. In these verses, Cyrus is referred to as the “Lord’s anointed,” indicating that he was chosen by God for a specific purpose. This purpose, as interpreted by Jewish tradition, was to allow the Jewish exiles in Babylon to return to their homeland and to support the reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. In essence, Cyrus was seen as an instrument of God’s will, facilitating the return of the Jews to their land and the reestablishment of their religious practices. The following verses from Ezra underscore this idea:

Ezra 1:1-3:

In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, when the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah was fulfilled, the Lord roused the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia to issue a proclamation throughout his realm by word of mouth and in writing as follows: Thus said King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord God of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has charged me with building Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Anyone of you of all His people—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem that is in Judah and build the House of the Lord God of Israel, the God that is in Jerusalem;

Ezra 1:7-8

Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from



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Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god. These King Cyrus of Persia released through the office of Mithredath the treasurer, who gave an inventory of them to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.

Ezra3:7:

They paid the hewers and craftsmen with money, and the Sidonians and Tyrians with food, drink, and oil to bring cedarwood from Lebanon by sea to Joppa, in accord with the authorization granted them by King Cyrus of Persia.

Ezra 4:3:

Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the chiefs of the clans of Israel answered them, "It is not for you and us to build a House to our God, but we alone will build it to the Lord God of Israel, in accord with the charge that the king, King Cyrus of Persia, laid upon us

Ezra 4:5:

They bribed ministers in order to thwart their plans all the years of King Cyrus of Persia and until the reign of King Darius of Persia.

Ezra 5:13-17:

But in the first year of King Cyrus of Babylon, King Cyrus issued an order to rebuild this House of God. Also the silver and gold vessels of the House of God that Nebuchadnezzar had taken away from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to the temple in Babylon—King Cyrus released them from the temple in Babylon to be given to the one called Sheshbazzar whom he had appointed governor. He said to him, "Take these vessels, go, deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem, and let the House of God be rebuilt on its original site." That same Sheshbazzar then came and laid the foundations for the House of God in Jerusalem; and ever since then it has been under construction, but is not yet finished.' And now, if it please the king, let the royal archives there in Babylon be searched to see whether indeed an order had been issued by King Cyrus to rebuild this House of



God in Jerusalem. May the king convey to us his pleasure in this matter.”

Ezra 6:3:

In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued an order concerning the House of God in Jerusalem: ‘Let the house be rebuilt, a place for offering sacrifices, with a base built up high. Let it be sixty cubits high and sixty cubits wide,

Ezra 6:14:

So the elders of the Jews progressed in the building, urged on by the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah son of Iddo, and they brought the building to completion under the aegis of the God of Israel and by the order of Cyrus and Darius and King Artaxerxes of Persia.

The recognition of Cyrus the Great as the Messiah in Jewish religious texts is-documented, supported by several other historical sources and texts as well including:

**The Cyrus Cylinder:** An ancient clay cylinder dating back to Cyrus’ reign contains inscriptions describing his policies of religious tolerance and support for various communities, including the Jews. This archaeological artifact corroborates the benevolent image of Cyrus as depicted in Jewish texts.

**Jewish Historical Writings:** Jewish historians, such as Flavius Josephus, have extensively written about Cyrus the Great’s role in Jewish history. Flavius Josephus’s historical work, “Antiquities of the Jews,” provides an invaluable perspective on the pivotal role of Cyrus the Great in Jewish history. Josephus’s narrative emphasizes the profound impact of Cyrus’s conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE on the Jewish community. He portrays Cyrus as a benevolent and divinely chosen figure who liberated the Jewish exiles from Babylonian captivity. This perspective underscores Cyrus’s significance as a pivotal historical figure in facilitating the return of the Jews to their homeland and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. Josephus’s account also highlights the theological dimension of Cyrus’s role, portraying him as an instrument of God’s providence, thus integrating politics, history, and religious faith into the Jewish narrative.



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**Josephus's writings:** Josephus's writings provide a historical validation of the biblical accounts regarding Cyrus's contributions to Jewish history. By providing an external, non-biblical source that corroborates the events surrounding the Babylonian exile and the Edict of Cyrus, Josephus enhances our understanding of this critical period. In essence, Josephus's "Antiquities of the Jews" not only presents a historical account but also adds depth to the theological significance of Cyrus the Great in the Jewish tradition, emphasizing the belief that even non-Jewish rulers can play a pivotal role in fulfilling God's plans for His people.

**Rabbinic Literature:** Jewish rabbinic literature, including the Talmud and Midrash, further elaborates on Cyrus' significance as the Messiah and his role in the Jewish return to Jerusalem. Cyrus's conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE was a momentous historical event. Some researchers suggest that Jews may have assisted him in this endeavor, contributing to the relatively smooth conquest of the empire. Nebonid, the ruling Babylonian king at the time, had a reputation for oppressive rule, which may have played a part in the ease of Cyrus's conquest. Understanding the specific grievances of various subject populations, including the Jews, under Nebonid's rule is crucial in assessing their potential support for Cyrus.

Regarding the conquest of Babylon and Cyrus's decree to free the Jews from captivity, several passages in the Torah, Talmud, and Midrash provide insights. These texts draw from the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, foretelling the liberation of the Jews imprisoned in Babylon.

The connection between Cyrus the Great and Iranian Jews transcends religious affiliation; it is intertwined with the broader history and identity of Iran. Cyrus is celebrated as a foundational figure in Persian history, symbolizing Persian greatness and enlightenment. His legacy as a just and benevolent ruler is a source of pride for Iranians, regardless of their religious background. For Iranian Jews in particular, this connection serves as a bridge between their Jewish identity and their Iranian heritage, exemplifying the inclusivity and multiculturalism that has often characterized Iranian society.

This historic connection between Cyrus the Great and Iranian Jews stands



as a testament to the enduring impact of enlightened leadership, religious tolerance, and the power of cultural preservation across centuries. It serves as a symbol of unity in diversity, both within the Iranian nation and the broader landscape of human history.

The enduring legacy of Cyrus the Great and his remarkable relationship with the Jewish community is a testament to the power of history, memory, and heritage preservation. Through the centuries, Cyrus has not merely been remembered by the Jewish people but celebrated as a divine savior figure, a Messiah, whose benevolence and support allowed the Jewish exiles to return to their homeland and rebuild their sacred temple. Cyrus's benevolence extended beyond liberation; he facilitated the return of sacred artifacts and treasures, laying the foundation for the reconstruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem.

In this context, within the Torah and, subsequently, within the collective Jewish cultural memory, the stature, role, and grandeur of Cyrus the Great manifest with greater prominence than that attributed to Moses, who is revered as the paramount emissary of Jewish prophecy. Moses is identified within the Old Testament, namely the Torah, as the Shepherd of Israel, a Prophet, a Lawgiver, the Leader of the Exodus, and the Servant of Elohim or Adonai, whereas Cyrus the Great is anointed with the title of Messiah. Consequently, for the Jewish community, spanning across diasporic communities and their ancestral homeland of Israel, the name and persona of this Persian monarch hold unparalleled significance. It is conceivable that without the persistent and recurrent references within Jewish historical accounts, the historical veracity of this illustrious monarch might have considerably dimmed with the passage of time.

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## *Chronicles of Cyrus the Great*

“Of Cyrus himself, even now in the songs and stories of the East, the record lives that nature made him most fair to look upon, and set in his hear the threefold love of human, of knowledge, and of honor. He would endure all labors, he would undergo all dangers, for the sake of glory. Blest by nature with such gifts of soul and body, his memory lives to this day in the mindful heart of ages.”

Xenophon, The Education of Cyrus (Cryopaedia), 1:2 (translated by H.G. Dakyns)

This article is dedicated to the memory of Amélie Kuhrt, a prominent scholar of the Achaemenid history, who died in January 2023 at age 78. Born in Germany in September 1944, Amélie was brought to England at a young age and studied ancient history at King's College, University College, and SOAS in London. She was Professor Emeritus at University College, London, where she taught for forty years (1979-2009). She was elected a fellow of the British Academy in 2001. Kuhrt was co-organizer and co-editor of the “Achaemenid History Workshops” from 1981-1990 in Groningen and other cities, which resulted in the 16-volume Achaemenid History (1987-2020). The first nine volumes of this monumental work have been translated into Persian.



تاریخ هخامنشیان (۹ جلدی)، ترجمه مرتضی ثاقب فر، نشر توس، ۱۳۸۸

The Iranian plateau and the mountains of Zagros and Alborz surrounding it have been home to peoples and civilizations for millennia. However, it was

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the Medes (678-549 BC) (مادها) who created the first Iranian empire, which was later handed over (in a military loss) to another Iranian dynasty – the Achaemenids (هخامنشیان) (the Old Persian *hakha-manesh* means “friendly mind or manner”). Cyrus II of the Achaemenid dynasty, historically known as Cyrus the Great, who lived from 600 to 530 BC, is one of the greatest leaders in world history. He was a prince of Anshan, a small city state in southwest Iran, but, due to his genius in warfare and statesmanship, he rose to overrun the Median empire in northern Iran in 550 BC, the Lydian empire in Anatolia in 547 BC, Elam (with capital Susa) in 540 BC, and finally, Babylon in 539 BC. Cyrus’s strategy and military conquests were for creating a world empire in which various peoples lived in peace and prosperity. When he entered Babylon on 12 October 539 BC, his army did not massacre or enslave the inhabitants; Cyrus rather granted them freedom of religion, lifestyle, language, work, and culture. In recent years, Iranians have unofficially designated October 12 (the seventh day of Aban, the eighth month in the Iranian calendar) as the Day of Cyrus the Great. It was Cyrus the Great who laid the foundations the Achaemenid Persian empire, which stretched from the Nile valley and Anatolia (Asia Minor) on the west through the main Iranian plateau to the Indus valley and central Asia on the east, and operated for nearly two centuries (550-330 BC), until it was conquered by Alexander III of Macedonia. In the first volume of *The Story of Civilization*, William Durant remarks that the Persian Empire of the Achaemenid kings was the first largest political organization in the antiquity and one of the best-governed in history. For Iranians, Cyrus the Great, holds a special position. He is regarded as the founding father of their nation. In 2012, BBC Persian produced a six-part documentary on the biography of six prominent figures (بزرگان ایران) in the history of Iran and invited the viewers to pick one of them as the most influential personality; the winner was Cyrus the Great (the others included Zoroaster, Ferdowsi, Avicenna, Hafez, and Mosaddeq). Despite his current popularity, strangely however, Cyrus the Great, or for that matter the great Achaemenid kings, do not appear in the *Shahnameh* (“Book of Kings”) of Ferdowsi – mainly because Ferdowsi based his epic on the sources compiled during the Sassanids (224-651 AD, ساسانیان), and the Sassanids either did not have any knowledge

of the Achaemenid kings, or, out of envy, did not want to acknowledge their glorious history. Luckily, the chronicles of Cyrus the Great have been recorded to some extent in the Western literature dating back to the classical Greek times. The purpose of this article is to review the historiography of Cyrus the Great based on the extant sources and discuss how these sources have greatly contributed to our present understanding of Cyrus and his empire.

## **Classical Greek Sources**

These sources include *Historia* by Herodotus, *Cyropaedia* ("education of Cyrus") by Xenophon, and *Persica* by Ctesias. Of these, Herodotus is often considered by many scholars to be more reliable, although some insights can also be gained from the other two works.

Herodotus was born around 484 BC in the city of Halicarnassus in Asia Minor (now Bodrum in Turkey) during the reign of Xerxes I (خشایارشا اول), and died in about 425 BC probably in Macedonia. Herodotus travelled widely and is regarded as the Father of History (an honor bestowed upon him by Cicero), mainly because, unlike Homer who based on his epic poems on myths, Herodotus used hearsay, reports, and records to write his book.

Herodotus intended to write the twenty-year history of Greco-Persian wars (499-479 BC), but he expanded his *Histories* (the Greek term *historia* means "inquiry") to discuss the roots and background of these conflicts. Herodotus began writing *The Histories* in 449 BC, soon after the Greek navy defeated the Persian army at Salamis, a city in Cyprus.

*The Histories* of Herodotus has been translated into English by a dozen different scholars since the mid-19th centuries. These include translations by Henry Cary (1859); George Rawlinson (1858-1860 in four volumes, revised and republished in a single volume by The Modern Library, 1942, Wordsworth Classics, 1996, and Everyman's Library, 1997), George Macaulay (1890, two volumes; revised and published in a single volume in 2004 by Barnes & Noble), Alfred Denis Godley (1926 in four volumes; reprinted several times by Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press), Aubrey de Sélincourt (1954, Penguin Books, revised by John Marincola in 1996), Harry Carter (1958 in two volumes, Heritage Press), David Grene (1985, University of



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Chicago Press), Robin Waterfield (1998, Oxford World Classics), Andrea Purvis (Pantheon, 2007), Walter Blanco (Norton, 1992, 2013), Tom Holland (Penguin, 2013), and Pamela Mensch (Hackett, 2014). The book has also been translated into Persian twice – by Hādi Hedāyati and Vahid Mazandarāni.

تاریخ هرودوت، ترجمه هادی هدایتی، انتشارات دانشگاه تهران، ۱۳۳۶-۱۳۴۱، ۶ جلد در ۵ مجلد  
تواریخ هرودوت، از ترجمه انگلیسی رالینسون، ترجمه غلامعلی وحید مازندرانی، بنگاه ترجمه و نشر کتاب،  
۱۳۴۳ (فرهنگستان ادب و هنر، ۱۳۵۷؛ دنیای کتاب، ۱۳۶۸) ۵۷۳ ص

Xenophon of Athens (circa 430-355 BC) was a Greek military leader and historian (and a student of Socrates), who at the age of thirty was elected a military commander in the Greek mercenary army of the Achaemenid empire to accompany Cyrus the Younger (the Satrap of Lydia and son of Darius II) on a military campaign to claim the Persian throne from his elder brother Artaxerxes II. The campaign of the “Ten Thousand” soldiers in the service of Cyrus the Younger failed in 401 BC (and the young Cyrus was killed in the battle). Xenophon recounted the history of this campaign in the *Anabasis* (or “The March of the Ten Thousand” as some English translations have called), written in the 370s BC. This book is not in the scope of the present article. But Xenophon also wrote *Cyropaedia* (meaning “Cyrus’s education”) which is a partly fictional biography of Cyrus the Great and how he won wars and ruled his vast empire and. This influential book, writing in the 360s BC was for long regarded as a manual for an ideal, just and successful political leader. Thomas Jefferson, one of the Founding Fathers of the USA who wrote the American United Declaration of Independence and whose views and writings inspired the American Bill of Rights, was very fond of *Cyropaedia*, and Jefferson’s copy of the book with his handwritten notations in the margins has survived.

There are several English translations of Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* or *The Education of Cyrus* including those by Maurice Ashley (London, 1803; Philadelphia, 1810), Walter Miller (volumes 5 and 6 of “Xenophon in Seven Volumes,” 1914, William Heinemann, London, and Harvard University Press); Henry Graham Dakyns (Everyman’s Library, 1914; republished in 1992 by J.M. Dent & Sons, with an introduction and notes by Richard Stonemann). Wayne Ambler (Cornell University Press, 2001). Three separate Persian translations of *Cyropaedia* have been published in Iran.

کوروش نامه، گزنفون، ترجمه رضا مشایخی، بنگاه ترجمه و نشر کتاب، ۱۳۴۲، ۳۴۳ ص (انتشارات علمی و فرهنگی، ۱۳۸۴، ۲۸۴ ص)  
سیرت کوروش، گزنفون، ترجمه غلامعلی وحید مازندرانی، بانک بازرگانی تهران، ۱۳۵۰، ۳۶۱ ص (دنیای کتاب، ۱۳۸۴)  
تربیت کوروش، گزنفون، ترجمه بهمن کریمی، اقبال، ۱۳۵۰، ۳۱۴ ص

Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* still retains its value and influence in our century. Larry Herick, a former US Air Force officer and a military historian, has recently rewritten the *Cyropaedia* as an inspiring work on statesmanship. His popular book, *Xenophon's Cyrus the Great: The Arts of Leadership and War* (2006) has also been translated into Persian (published by Ketab Corporation, Los Angeles).

کوروش بزرگ گزنفون: هنر رهبری، لری هدریک، ترجمه کورش زعیم، شرکت کتاب لوس آنجلس، ۲۰۰۸ میلادی، ۲۳۳ ص

Xenophon wrote *Persica* and *Indica* in the last decades of his life (probably 370-360 BC). At the end of *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon writes that "Of all the powers in Asia, the kingdom of Cyrus showed itself to be the greatest and most glorious." But then Xenophon adds that that over time, Cyrus' successors "began to decay" and that "the Persians have degenerated." (translation by Dakyns).

Ctesias of Cnidus, who lived in the fifth century BC, was a Greek physician and served for more than 15 years at the court of the Achaemenid king Artaxerxes II (اردشیر دوم). He was born in Cnidus in the western province of Caria in Anatolia (then part of the Achaemenid empire). Interestingly, Ctesias accompanied Artaxerxes II on the military expedition against Cyrus the Younger (while Xenophon was on the side of Cyrus the Younger as mentioned above). Ctesias wrote two books: *Persica* and *Indica*. He wrote these books in the Ionian dialect of Greek. *Persica* narrates in 23 parts the history of Assyria, Babylon, foundation of the Persian empire by Cyrus the Great, and the other kings and events up to the year 398 BC. His book *Indica* mainly gives the accounts of Indian land and people as the Persians of his age knew. Although Ctesias claims to have had access to Persian court archives, many historians do not place much credibility on his books because of fabulous stories found in them; nevertheless, Ctesias should not be totally dismissed and his works deserve to be investigated both textually and contextually.

The definitive edition of the surviving fragments of Ctesias' books is the one



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critically edited and published by Felix Jacoby in 1958 (*Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, vol. IIIc1, pp. 416-517, Leiden). Jacoby also published a scholarly analysis of Ctesias in 1922 ("Ktesias," in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft Fragmente*, vol. XI, no.2, pp. 2032-2073, Druckenmüller, Stuttgart). These two sources are indispensable to the scholars. One of the best translations of Persica is the French translation by J. Aubergier (*Ctésias.Histoires de l'Orient*, Paris, 1991), while the oldest translation is in Germany by J.C.F. Bähr in 1824 (*Fragmente des Ktesias von Knidos*, Frankfurt).

There are several English translations and analyses of Persica; notably, *The Fragments of the Persika of Ktesias*, edited with introduction and notes by John Gilmore (Macmillan, London, 1888); *The Complete Fragments of Ctesias of Cnidus: Translation and Commentary with an Introduction* by Andrew Nichols (PhD dissertation, University of Florida, 2008); *Ctesias' Persian History, Part I: Introduction, Text, and Translation* by Jan Stronk (Wellem Verlag, Düsseldorf, 2010); *Ctesias' History of Persian: Tales of the Orient* by Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones and James Robson (Routledge, 2010); *Ctesias' Persica in the Its Near Eastern Context* by Matt Waters (University of Wisconsin Press, 2017). Persica has not been translated into Persian yet.

Herodotus, Xenophon, and Ctesias provide the main Greek sources on the life of Cyrus the Great, and many authors have used these. But there are also brief references to Cyrus in a number of other Greek books, including Berossus' *Babyloniaca* (written in 290-278 BC) which mentions the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus, and Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (around 110 AD) which writes of Alexander's admiration for Cyrus. The Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible) books of Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Kings, and Chronicles make references to the Jewish captivity in Babylon, the liberation of Jews by Cyrus, reconstruction of the second temple at Jerusalem and other events during the reign of the Achaemenid kings. Cyrus is mentioned 19 times in the Jewish Bible and in some places, he is praised as God-sent "Shepherd" and "Anointed" (for example, Isaiah, 45:1) – the only non-Jewish personality in the antiquity so honored and revered in the Hebrew Bible.

The British historian Amélie Kuhrt compiled all of the scattered ancient sources on the Achaemenids and organized them thematically in a single volume (*The*

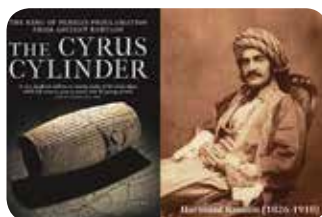




Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources of the Achaemenid Period, Routledge, London, 2007, 1020 p). This book deserves to be translated into Persian.

## The Cyrus Cylinder and Pasargadae

In 1879, during excavation of a Babylonian temple in Mesopotamia (today's Iraq), a barrel-shaped cylinder of baked clay with inscription in Akkadian cuneiform was uncovered by the Assyro-British archeologist Hormuzd Rassam (هرمزد رسام).



Named the Cyrus Cylinder, it measures 21.9 cm long and is kept at British Museum in London. The inscription is a proclamation by Cyrus as to how he entered Babylon peacefully, overthrew the Babylonian king Nabonidus, brought justice and liberty to the people, and restored temples and religious freedom. Cyrus's decree to respect cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity has promoted the Cylinder as one of the earliest charters of human rights; scholars have also pointed out the public relations or propaganda aspect of the inscription. In 1971, when Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi hosted an international festival to commemorate the 2500-year celebration of the Persian empire, the Cylinder was on display in Tehran. Iran also donated a replica of the Cylinder to the University National in New York. In 2010 the Cyrus Cylinder exhibition was held at the National Museum of Iran – the second time ever. In 2013, the Iranian Heritage Foundation (a non-profit organization in London) together with the British Museum and the Smithsonian Institution a touring exhibition of The Cyrus Cylinder and Ancient Persia at the Arthur Sackler Gallery (located at the Smithsonian Institution) in Washington DC as well as five other museums in New York, Houston, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. A companion volume (The Cyrus Cylinder and Ancient Persia: A New Beginning for the Middle East), written by John Curtis, was published by The British Museum in 2013. The book included the latest translation of the Cyrus Cylinder by Irving Frankel, a Keeper of Ancient Mesopotamian Script, Languages and Culture at the British Museum, who also independently published a separate and more detailed book: The Cyrus Cylinder: The Great Persian Edict from Babylon (I. B. Tauris, London, 2013, 160 p.). This is regarded as the latest and best English translation of the Cylinder. The best Persian translation of the



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Cylinder is the one published by Shahrokh Razmjoo.

استوانه کوروش بزرگ: تاریخچه و ترجمه کامل متن، ترجمه شاهرخ رزمجو، نشر فرزانه روز، ۱۳۸۹

Archeological excavations and investigations of monuments and inscriptions at Mesopotamia, Susa, Persepolis and Pasargadae since the mid-19th century have shed much light on the Achaemenid history. In particular, Pasargadae (located 90 km northeast of Shiraz), an Achaemenid capital and home to Cyrus's tomb, was explored by Ernst Herzfeld, Erich Schmidt, Ali Sami (Pasargadae. The Oldest Imperial. Capital of Iran, translated by R.N. Sharp, Musavi Print, Shiraz, 1956, 1971), and David Stronach (Pasargadae. A Report of the Excavations Conducted by the British Institute of Persian Studies from 1961 to 1963, Oxford University Press, 1978).

## Modern Biographies and Historical Novels

The first historical novel on Cyrus the Great dates back to the 17th century. Interestingly, it was written by a French female writer in ten volumes (totaling 2 million words); it remains the longest novel ever published. The book entitled *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus* was published in Paris in 1650-1654. Its author was Madeleine de Scudéry (1607-1701), often known simply as Mademoiselle de Scudéry, a prolific and popular French writer of biographies of historical figures. Most of her historical novels were several-volume long with lots of conversations, incidents, and of course romance. She never married but had a close romantic relationship with another French writer Paul Pellisson until his death. Mademoiselle de Scudéry's elder brother Georges de Scudéry was also a playwright and author, and some mistook him to be the author of Madeleine's books. An English translation of *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus* (entitled *Artamenes, or, The Grand Cyrus*) by F. G. Gent was published in 1653-1655 in London. Recently, an abridged version of it has been translated into Persian.



کوروش و ماندانا، مادلن دو اسکودری، ترجمه کیومرث پارسای، انتشارات سمیر، ۱۳۸۷، ۵۸۴ ص

In late 19th and early 20th centuries, several biographies of Cyrus the Great appeared in various European languages. These books relied on the classical Greek sources, and were written in a plain language for the general public.

In 1878, Jacob Abbott (1803-1879), an American educator and prolific author

of biographies and history books, published Cyrus the Great, a highly readable book for young adults (Harper & Row, New York, 289 p.) which was reprinted several times (the copy I have read was published in 1902, with seven engravings, in the series "Makers of History" by the original publisher).



(Abbott also wrote biographies of Darius the Great, 1878, and Xerxes the Great, 1850. Of these three books, only Darius the Great has been translated into Persian.)

The French scholar of ancient Mesopotamia Arthur Amiaud (1849-1889) published *Cyrus, Roi de Perse* in 1886 (F. Vieweg Libraire-Editeur, Paris).

In 1907, the German scholar Wolfgang Wilhelm published *Kyros der Weltherrscher: Nach Xenophon und Herodot frei für die Jugend bearbeitet* ("Cyrus the World Ruler: After Xenophon and Herodotus, freely adapted for youth") (Akademischer Verlag, Wien and Leipzig, 229 p.) which was reprinted 1910, 1920, 1930. This book has been translated to Persian.

کوروش حکمران جهان، ولفگانگ ویلهلم، ترجمه کریم طاهرزاده بهزاد، کمیته جشن شاهنشاهی دبیرستان اندیشه، تهران، ۱۳۴۶، ۲۱۰ ص

کوروش شهریار دادگر، ولفگانگ ویلهلم، ترجمه کریم طاهرزاده بهزاد، با دیباچه ای از بهرام شالگونی، نشر جامی، تهران، ۱۳۸۶، ۲۷۲ ص

Justin Václav Prášek (1853-1924), a Czech historian of ancient Iran studied at Prague (obtaining his doctorate degree in 1882) and worked as a teacher. His small book *Kyros der Grosse* was published in 1912 (*Alte Orient* 13:3, Leipzig, 32 p.). He continued to write a biography of Kambyases (1914, *Alte Orient* 14:2, 31 p.) and Dareios (1914, *Alte Orient* 14:4, 36 p.), published in Leipzig.

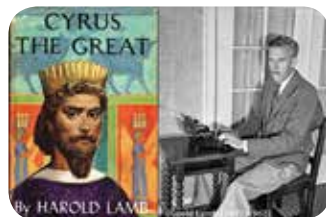
Albert Champdor, a popular French author of historical biographies, published *Cyrus* in 1952 (Albin Michel, Paris, 373 p.) which has been translated into Persian twice – by Mohammad Ghāzi and Hādi Hedāyati.

کوروش کبیر، آلبر شاندور، ترجمه محمد قاضی، انتشارات زرین، ۱۳۷۱، ۴۲۹ ص  
کوروش کبیر، آلبر شاندور، ترجمه هادی هدایتی، نشر ثالث، ۱۳۸۶، ۳۳۲ ص

Perhaps the best-known biographical novel of Cyrus the Great is the one written by the American writer Harold Lamb (1892-1962) and published in 1960 (Doubleday, New York, 309 p.) Lamb graduated from Columbia University

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majoring in Asian history and began writing for various magazines. He was prolific writer and published novels, short stories, biographies, history books, and film scripts totaling nearly 90 works. During World War II, Lamb worked at the US Office of Strategic Services in Iran and later worked as



advisor to the US Department of State and director of the American Friends of the Middle East. He spoke several languages including French, Latin, Persian and Arabic. The history of the Middle East was a central theme in his works. Many of Lamb's books, including *Cyrus the Great*, have been translated into Persian.

کوروش کبیر، هارولد لمب، ترجمه صادق رضازاده شفق، ابن سینا، ۱۳۳۵، ۳۸۰ ص (دانشگاهیان، ۱۳۸۸؛ پارسه، ۱۳۸۷)

Alexander Jovy, a film director who was born in 1971 in Berlin but has lived and studied in Switzerland and England, has published a historical fiction, *I Am Cyrus: The Story of the Real Prince of Persia* (Garnet Publications, Reading, UK, 2011, 330 p.) with this statement on the title page: "His passion captured hearts; his courage inspired a nation." This book has been translated into Persian.

منم کوروش: سرگذشت شاهزاده ای که کوروش کبیر نامیده شد، الکساندر جووی، ترجمه مهدی افشار، انتشارات پورشاد، ۱۳۹۳، ۴۲۸ ص

Recently, I came across a four-volume historical novel (totaling about 1850 pages) about Cyrus the Great, written by C. J. Kirwin. Carroll Joseph Kirwin lives in Oklahoma with his family. Kirwin was born in Boston, Massachusetts, and graduated from Northeastern University in Boston in Biology and later obtained an MS in toxicology from the University of San Francisco. Kirwin worked as a toxicologist for 33 years in the industry, including Phillips petroleum company. He published a number of research papers on toxicology and his extensive travels overseas led him to an interest in ancient history. After retiring, Kirwin decided to write a historical novel, and he chose Cyrus the Great for his theme, partly because his Iranian son-in-law named Cyrus had mentioned interesting things about the ancient Persian king. It took Kirwin twelve years to research and write his book, which



came out in four volumes: *Dawn of the Greatest Persian: The Childhood of Cyrus the Great* (2003, 414 p.); *Finding the Persian Way: Cyrus the Great Travels in Ancient Persia* (2004, 326 p.); *The Persian Epoch Continues: Cyrus II Becomes King of Persia and Media* (2009, 580 p.); *Triumphs of the Greatest Persian: Cyrus the Great Molds a New Persia* (2009, 530 p.). All these books were published by AuthorHouse.

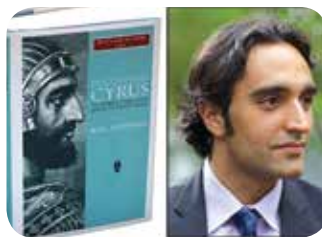
## **Cyrus in the Twenty-First Literature**

Several readable books in English on Cyrus the Great have appeared in the 21st century. These books deserve to be translated into Persian. *Discovering Cyrus: The Persian Conqueror Astride the Ancient World* by Reza Zarghamee (Mage, Washington D.C., 2013, 784 p.) is a massive work and a true labor of love. Its author, Reza Zarghamee, was born in London in 1978 to Persian parents who had left Iran during the Islamic revolution. He studied at Columbia University majoring history and biology. During his student years, he took classes in Old Persian language and Zoroastrianism. Although Zarghamee was trained to be a lawyer (with a degree from Harvard Law School) and is a practicing attorney in Virginia, he devoted many years to the researching and writing of *Discovering Cyrus*.

*Cyrus the Great: An Ancient Iranian King*, edited by Touraj Daryaee (professor at the University of California, Irvine) (Afshar Publishing, 2013, 114 p.) was published in 2013, coeval with the exhibition of the Cyrus Cylinder in the USA. This book has been translated into Persian twice.

کوروش بزرگ بنیانگذار امپراطوری هخامنشی، گردآوری تورج دریایی، ترجمه خشایار بهاری، انتشارات فرزانه، ۱۳۹۴، ۱۲۶ ص  
کوروش بزرگ: پادشاه باستانی ایران، گردآوری تورج دریایی، ترجمه آذردخت جلیلیان، نشر توس، ۱۴۰۲، ۸۸ ص

*Cyrus the Great: Life and Lore*, edited by M. Rahim Shayegan (published by Ilex Foundation, Boston and Center for Hellenic Studies at Harvard University, 2018) is a collection of 15 articles contributed by various scholars. The volume is actually the proceedings of an international conference on Cyrus the Great held in October 2013 at the University of California, Los Angeles, where the volume's editor is a professor of Iranian studies.



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Two most recent books on Cyrus the Great include *Cyrus the Great: Conqueror, Liberator, Anointed One*, by Stephen Dando-Collins (Turner Publishing, Nashville, 2020) and *King of the World: The Life of Cyrus the Great* by Matt Waters (a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire) (Oxford University Press, 2022), which is an encyclopedic coverage of Cyrus's life (including an easy-to-understand translation of the Cyrus Cylinder).



## Concluding Remarks

There is a rich Western historiography, both in ancient Greece and in the modern times, about Cyrus the Great and that he has been treated with respect and admiration. This article has attempted to contextualize the literature, particularly in English, about the Cyrus the Great. The name Cyrus (from the Old Persian *kurush*, meaning “humiliator of the enemy”) is one of the few Persian names that has been adopted in European languages both as a given name (for example, Cyrus West Field, an American businessman who laid the first telegraphic cable across the Atlantic Ocean in 1858) and as a family name (for example, Miley Cyrus the popular singer). In the past century, a large number of the Western books about Cyrus have been translated into Persian, although there are still several key works that need to be translated (notably, Ctesias’ *Persica*, Stronach, 1978; Kuhrt, 2007; Zarghamee, 2013; Waters, 2022). Among the modern Iranian scholars who have made significant contribution to the historiography of Cyrus mention should be made of Hasan Pirnia (حسن پیرنیا) whose three-volume *Ancient Iran* (ایران باستان) (published in Tehran, 1933-1934 / 1312-1313, and reprinted many times) synthesized in Persian all the ancient and European sources about the Cyrus and the Achaemenids. Pirnia’s work, decades after its publication, still stands out as a very useful work in Persian in this subject. Although books are valuable tools, the production of a modern major movie about the life and times of Cyrus the Great is overdue and deserves serious attention from the script writers and film directors. Finally, it should be noted that archaeological excavations and investigations of monuments, tablets and inscriptions (in various ancient languages), coins and other remains in the territories of the former Persian empire will further advance our knowledge of the Achaemenid history.



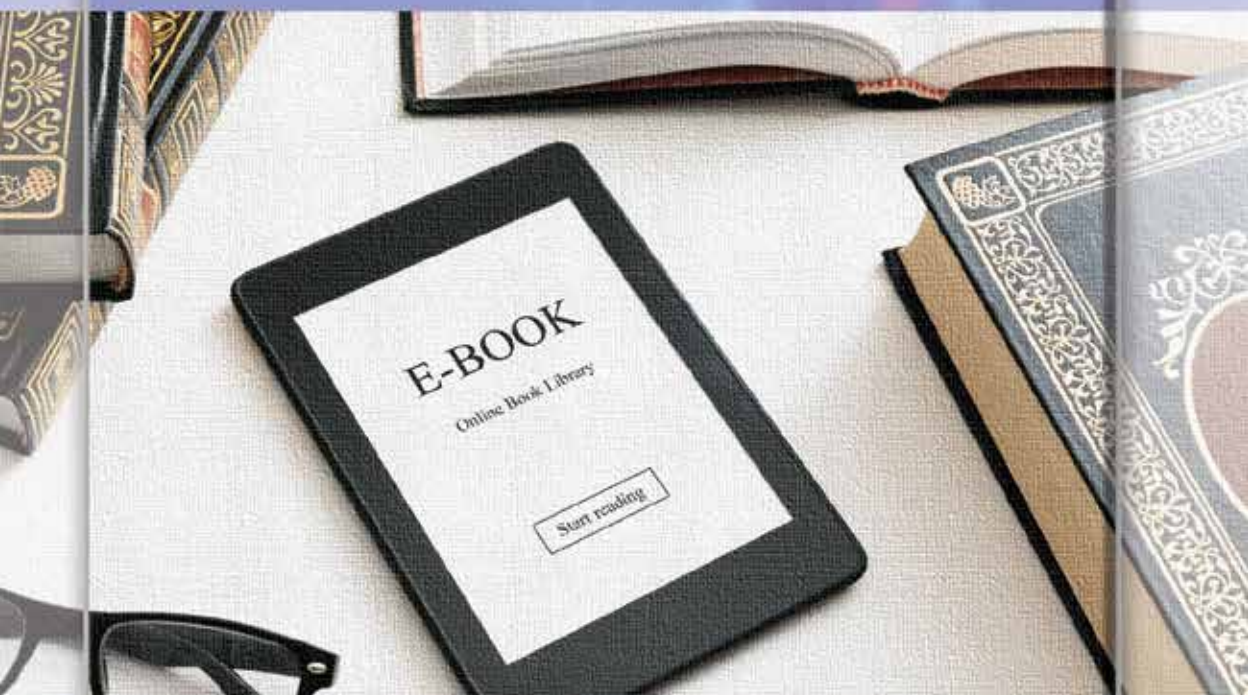
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